

**THE HOLOGRAPHIC SELF: SELF-REPRESENTATION AND LOGICS OF DIGITALITY
IN THREE CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVES OF COSMOPOLITANISM**

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Abstract

This dissertation is an examination of the holographic self in three contemporary novels of cosmopolitanism. The holographic self is a concept I present which expands upon the cyborg to foreground a self that operates in relation to a “hologram”—a public-facing digital self-representation—or operates in the logic of such. In this project, I deploy two models of the holographic self: one in which the hologram functions as an interface for fantasy to move toward an actualization of an ego-ideal; and another in which the amalgam of holograms or instantiations of self form a rhizomatic or constellational arrangement of subjectivity in which movement itself is prioritized. In each of the focal novels—Gautam Malkani's *Londonstani*; Hari Kunzru's *Transmission*; Teju Cole's *Open City*—the protagonist functions as a holographic self in a manner that expresses a desire for a post-positionality subjectivity, where traditional notions of bodily or singular identity itself are exceeded. In chapter one I argue that in *Londonstani*, protagonist Jas seeks to produce a culturally hybrid self in which the virtual is used as a tool of self-actualization, as it ultimately prioritizes the bodily self reconfigured by its holographic dimensions. I compare the novel to Wilde's *Portrait of Dorian Gray* to suggest that text has no similarly phenomenal ground for an “outsourced self.” In chapter two, I assert that in *Transmission*, Arjun also operates in relation to a hologram of self, but the text's desire for Arjun to exceed identity itself expresses a yearning for a non-bodily notion of selfhood that seeks to escape the policing of identity. I compare the novel to Brontë's *Jane Eyre* to argue that Jane's trajectory functions to manifest a set of inescapable material socio-

ideological constraints that demand a particular conclusion. In chapter three, I examine William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* and its explosion of taxonomy and signification in relation to digitality, and then argue that *Open City* manifests such ideas through a holographic self that desires escape from not just identity but consequence. I conclude by suggesting a potential harmony between the concept of the holographic self, digitality, and narratives of cosmopolitanism.

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INTRODUCTION: A SCATTERED, DISPERSED SELF

The conclusion of the 2013 film *Oblivion* sees saviour protagonist Jack Harper appearing to die—and then returning. The science fiction tale is, at least as these things go, relatively standard: an alien force destroys most of the life on Earth, and then, using a complex network of city-sized machines run by clone pairings—all of whom are unaware of each other or their true origin—carries out a mission of extracting energy from the planet while suppressing the remaining human population. All Jack and his partner Victoria have to do is to oversee operations until they return to the Tesseract, a base that hovers above Earth. Where the film deviates from the usual narrative, however, is that the Jack Harper clone whom the audience has come to know through the bulk of the film is, by the film's end, “replaced” by another Jack Harper clone, indistinguishable save for a differing number. Jack Harper 49 may have died defeating the evil aliens, but Jack Harper 52 is not only present and alive at the film's end but, given the film's closing shots, also seen as a romantic replacement for Julia, Jack Harper's long-lost wife.

In the way of so many narratives, it is a restoral of order, and in doing so an expression of both desire and ideology. Like Fortinbras's entrance at the end of *Hamlet* or Elizabeth and Darcy's marriage in *Pride and Prejudice*, the substitution of one Jack Harper for another produces the desired resolution that “fixes” a state of disarray: not only are Earth's remaining humans saved and the enemy defeated, but the sacrifice of Jack Harper 49 is mitigated by the arrival of what is completely “the perfect substitute.” It is a notion of identity and the subject that seems eminently of its time. Caught up in an ordinary tale of a hero's triumph over impossible odds is the sense that “Jack Harper” is not so much a

person or a subject but a virtual identity: a collectivity or multiplicity of instantiations that are largely interchangeable. The “real” or “actual” Jack Harper remains both separate from individual ones, yet somehow simultaneously an amalgam or conglomeration of all of them. The abstract numbering that marks out the various Jack Harpers—49 versus 52—exists in relation to the Jack Harper that has no number, receding as “he” is into a virtual horizon of possibility. The self in *Oblivion* is thus subject to a scattering or dispersion—across not only space and time, but consequently, fields of recognition and exchange as well. There are small, hermetically sealed worlds in which there is one Jack Harper clone, one Victoria clone, and each are iterated across the globe, while all exist in relation to a spacecraft in orbit, just barely visible as a point of reference on earth. There is the self, the other, and hovering above, a virtual home that promises to make the characters complete upon their return.

Oblivion presents a concept of selfhood for the digital era. Rather than being located at a singular spatio-temporal point—usually, a body—the self in the film can be read in at least two ways: one that finds its ideal or resolution in conjunction with an alternate representation of itself; or one composed of a set of relations—that the “ideal” is not an endpoint, but an ongoing movement back forth between itself and itself, so to speak. In each, there is the notion of an arrival at a point—one, the realization of fantasy through the conjoining of a bodily and extra-bodily identity (in this case, one clone becoming the “true” Jack Harper); the other, the realization of multiplicity, reforming the ground of self as a flattened set of relations which de-prioritize a singular body as originary, or indeed, even singular. It is thus also a concept of subjectivity and becoming-

self that both does and does not align with the common notion of a metaphorical mirror—of the (mis)recognition of self initiating a fundamental split between an exterior and an interior. In fact, *Oblivion* seems to render that distinction moot: what characterizes the self is locating it on a flattened horizon of externalities. All along, identities are sustained in relation to a constitutive field that is literally out of orbit, hovering out of reach in a fundamentally different space—even as its very separation is what sustains the fantasy of the many Jack Harpers.

To thus ask which Jack Harper is real would be to miss the point. Arguably, any gesture toward wholeness—toward something resembling the character in its unfinished entirety, the amalgam of the good and the bad—is only to be found in the space virtually suspended in the viewer’s imagination between the various Jack Harpers. The body, fields of self-recognition, and the imagination of the viewing or reading subject, are all bound up in this sense of the virtual, the thing that cannot exist without that which it reflects, yet, in its very combination of the physical, the imagistic, and the imagination, appears to have a utility—perhaps even what one might call an accuracy—in approaching identity.

How does digitality as a socio-historical phenomenon inflect narratives of becoming-self? After all, digitality as a field is conceptually at least now intimately bound up in both subjectivity and becoming-subject. The character of much online activity in the early 21st century would seem to affirm this assertion. In *The Second Self*, the seminal work on the psychological impact of digital technology, Sherry Turkle writes about “computer cultures” to refer to groups of people for whom “computers are a larger part of their lives than for most people” (*Second Self* 20). It’s a distinction that in the 2010s would

be both unhelpful and inaccurate. If much of the theorizing of digital technology initially relied on fictional interactive worlds in which individuals inhabited avatars, in recent years, as online use has expanded from tens of millions of users to nearing two billion, the emphasis has shifted from games to social networking sites (SNS). These sites rely on carefully curated profiles and textual and imagistic representations of self that often actually function as re-present-atives of the self in certain social economies. As Turkle writes later in *Life on the Screen*, if, as Jameson suggested, postmodernity lacked emblematic objects, then it found them in “the matrix of informational space” (45), “in the connections of the Internet and the World Wide Web” (45). For many, SNS as emblematic objects are now defining aspects of life and selfhood in the early twenty-first century. Their technologies are also phenomena that pertain to not only social interaction, but in many parts of the world are also intimately woven into employment and relations of capital. As such, it is not only increasingly difficult to discuss contemporary identity and subjectivity without taking digital technologies of self into account, but it is also equally important to factor these same technologies into a historical and economic or sociological framing of the times.

Such macro analysis, however, is less my specific concern than it is the framework and context for another. Rather, the aim of this project is to investigate how the impact of digital technologies like the World Wide Web on identity and subjectivity is expressed, grappled with, and manifested in contemporary literature of cosmopolitanism, paying particular attention to how the conclusions or ends of narratives deploy differing ideas of subjectivity, subject position, identity, and positionality itself. As the final section of

Oblivion reveals so much about which notion of the subject the film deploys—thinking about identity as iterative rather than inalienable—I aim to examine a selection of contemporary immigrant narratives to examine how their movement toward a specific kind of conclusion grounds, deploys, and is predicated upon a concept of identity that is connected either directly or indirectly to digital technology and the related concept of the holographic self as a socio-historical phenomenon. I do so by paying particular attention to both the situating of a virtual field of action in the novels, but also by engaging a concept called the holographic self, which aims to think of selfhood as it exists in *Oblivion*, for instance: a structure of digitally-inflected epistemology which functions as a relation operating between a body, subjectivity, and representations-of-self that work in simultaneous connection to one another as they are separated by spatial or temporal divisions.

A core concept of digitally inflected subjectivity is “putting the self elsewhere.” When we produce representations of a body or other recognizable dimensions of selfhood through pixels on a screen, “we step through the screen into virtual communities, [and] we reconstruct our identities on the other side of the looking glass” (Turkle, *Life* 178). The net effect is that the representation of a self and its physical corollary exist in a set of relations as either a binary pairing or a constellation of identity manifesting the now-common discourse of subjective multiplicity in a spatio-temporal scattering of the *imago*.¹ What I would assert is that, as it turns out, a virtual self—that is, identity inflected by and constructed in relation to virtual technologies—is not a *digital* thing per se, floating out there in the electronic ether. Instead, it is a discursive construction, floating virtually

between a body and the various representations of self, an amalgam of flesh, the imagination, words and images on paper, digital pixels, and the lines of connection between all of them. To wit, the self has always been relational, and has always been virtual; digital technology offers one more non-bodily point in that network of relations—and indeed, it is just the existence of this field for “non-bodily” representations in which I believe the difference of digitality lies. In this field the self as what I call a holographic self is also produced.

Often, the newness of digitality as a field is registered in obvious ways in narrative art. In popular films, such as *The Matrix*, *Inception*, or even children’s film *Coraline*, there is a clear alternate, virtual space, a refracted mirror-world in which normal rules do not apply, a gesture toward a new productive arena in which the ideological and material constraints of the here and now do not hold. At the same time, the division between the spaces is never quite clear-cut, and as is indicated by the blood that trickles from Neo’s shaking physical body in *The Matrix*, the bodily self and its projection elsewhere are intimately intertwined such that a bodily self and its “representatives”—which stand for the self in another system of exchange—are mutually co-constitutive.

I would argue, however, that the effect of recent technological trends is most interesting and ripe for analysis when narrative art evokes a response rooted in narrative scenarios and constructions that do not relate explicitly to new technology, but rather focus on the ways in which the day-to-day experience of identity and subjectivity has changed. In the 2008 film *Me and You and Everyone We Know*, for example, protagonist Christine is desperate to succeed as an artist. In a final attempt to get her work displayed,

she sends a video through the post, which the viewer sees as the gallery owner watches. That scene abruptly shifts to two subsequent ones: firstly, children Peter and Robby using a computer to create a representation of “society” using punctuation marks to stand in for people, with the older child suggesting these blank marks are “you, me, and everyone we know”; secondly, Christine sitting on a bed next to a phone, circling letters in a book to spell “ring.” It is the smallest of moments, but here is a representation of a subject mediated in numerous ways through both the technologies of information transmission, but also techne of self-presentation, the artifice of depicting oneself to others. Subjects are reduced to arbitrary marks on a page, which is quickly followed by the non-linear arrangement of meaning—a kind of scattering or randomization of linear semantic structures into signifiers with no clear signifieds—which parallels the atomization of the representation of self in public digital fields.

It is this often oblique, almost “epistemological” view of the impact of digital technology on subjectivity that is the emphasis of this dissertation. In it, I will focus on three contemporary novels and, in part through comparing them to novels from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, ask of them how the development and actualization² of a subject in the linear trajectory of his or her narrative is inflected, changed, and enabled by two different dimensions of digitality: firstly, digital technology as it is represented or used in the novel; and secondly the attendant epistemological concerns that are intimately connected to an understanding of and relationship with the functioning of digital technology in early 21st-century cultures. I will perform this analysis in order to set up a problematic in which I consider differing versions of what I am calling

the holographic self, a term meant to invoke the self as an amalgam of its body and its digital representations.

I use the terms development and actualization in order to underscore how, despite specific distinctions between *fabula* and *sujet*³, the linear structure of literary narrative as an aesthetic technology is often itself a mode of expressing or narrativizing specific ideals of the subject or of ideology. It does so through an evocation of a cultural, aesthetic framework, but also through character development. Although development, like the term evolution, can misleadingly imply an evaluative progression, I mean it here to connote change over time that operates in relation to an implied telos or goal of actualization that is not predetermined or given, but that is constructed in the terms of the narrative itself. Actualization, beyond the specific Deleuzian sense I will discuss later, will here point to the expression of the ideological, aesthetic and ethical expressions of concerns that texts themselves invoke and imply. The point is that my concern with the linear structure of literary narrative and my concern with subject-constitution are inextricably, rather than tangentially or coincidentally, linked.

For the purposes of this project, I am using the term digital to refer to technological developments in the nineteen-nineties and beyond that rely not just on the routing of ones and zeroes to form basic computing instructions (such as in a digital wristwatch), but rather Information Communication Technologies⁴ that create and rely on a network infrastructure, and in which social interaction and the representation of self and personality occur on or through these networks. I use digitality to refer to the overarching phenomenon of digital technology, but also the historical era within which

my definition of the digital occurs and applies. I refer to the internet⁵ as an infrastructure that supports the World Wide Web (those two terms not being interchangeable) and computers, such as smartphones, laptop and desktop computers and other developments, such as wearable computing. I will later make clear my emphasis on the network, but for now it suffices to say that it is due to the persistence of a network over space and time that enables the singular discursive construct of “a profile” or “a web page” to be accessed multiply from numerous locations simultaneously.

A Hologram Instead of a Mirror

What, then, do these technologies have to do with literature? Primarily, it is in their capacity to operate as a field for self-presentation, and the consequent effects on how literature conceives of, and expresses notions of, the subject. As Turkle suggests, “mirrors, literal and metaphorical ... allow us to see ourselves from the outside, and to objectify aspects of ourselves we had perceived only from within” (*Second Self* 155). The screen and various networks accessed through it function as another set of mirrors with their own unique characteristics, particularly in their capacity to be both immediately and immanently accessible—as with the smartphone or wearable computer—and to expand the reach and extent to which the subject lives in public. Yet, though one can consider the mirror as one form of metaphor for “selfing”—something I do intend to do—the relation between an off-body identity and the interiority of subjectivity may also demand differing ways of looking at the subject that do not accord with the notionally Lacanian model I have invoked so far. In particular, the ostensibly Deleuzian focus on notions of

self which are generative of not simply novelty, but novelty in relation to a field of generativity, are also of particular relevance.⁶ Significantly, however, the ubiquity of such technology and its function as a field of socio-material exchange in certain parts of the world thus obviously must be considered in any contemporary understanding of the formation of self, be that process a dialectical one, or something quite different.

Because I am emphasizing the idea of becoming-self, I will primarily focus upon the *Bildungsroman*, as its specific concern with coming of age in predominantly linear terms focuses the emphasis upon the formation and development of subjectivity. As Robyn McCallum notes in *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction*, “conceptions of subjectivity are intrinsic to narratives of personal growth or maturation” (3), and thus form an especially useful generic niche for examining how subjectivity may be changing. It is the implied telos of actualization—both in the psychological and Deleuzian⁷ senses of the term—that makes the *Bildungsroman* a particularly fruitful cultural locus for examining how subjectivity may or may not be changing.⁸ Yet, in addition to this emphasis upon actualization is a focus upon either *a* relation, or *a set* of relations: namely, that the actualization or realization of these narratives occurs either as a relation between an ideal and “ideal-izing” subject, or the subject conceived as a non-hierarchical set of relations itself.

This focus on *relation* gives rise to the title of this project, *The Holographic Self*. Holograms⁹ foreground relationality of at least two kinds: one between an object and a representation, and another between a substance or mechanism to produce a projection and the projection itself. More generally, however, as a concept—if perhaps not quite as a

phenomenon—holograms began as an attempt to create “a more versatile alternative to photography” (Firth 6) in which refracted light enables three-dimensional representations that can operate in three-dimensional space as a mimetic stand-in for the object. A common example is the cover of the December 1998 issue of *National Geographic*, in which a breaking globe appears to have dimensionality beyond the two dimensions of an image; another, arguably more useful one might be a futuristic and fictional museum in which a long-lost artefact may not be physically present, but can appear to be through distortions of light and colour. In such a scenario the holographic sarcophagus or what-have-you might be walked around and viewed as if it were a solid three-dimensional object rather than one “made of light.” As such, akin to the shift in computer graphics from two to three axes of dimensional representation, the hologram is an attempt to produce a representation (with all the tension implied in that much-fraught term) that highlights the potential for the re-presented thing to stand for and speak for the “original” thing in its absentia, but with an additional “dimension” to the representation.

This is among the reasons that the hologram as metaphor for subjectivity can be helpful. As opposed to the rhetoric of photography, in which one captures a moment in two dimensions at a specific point in time, holography as process is one of “recording” the three-dimensional nature of an object. The ideal aim, according to I.M. Firth in *Holography and Computer Generated Holograms* is to have a system that would:

record all the light scattered from an object, or at least many of the diffracted orders from all parts of the object, both in phase and amplitude, then on viewing the image produced by the system, the object would be truly recreated in its three-

dimensional nature. A change in viewing angle would produce a different perspective of the image, as would be the case in viewing the object. (7)

The description firstly foregrounds a relation between an object and a representation, and, further, a relation of partiality as well. One might argue, however, given recent work in Object Oriented Ontology¹⁰, that the relation of partiality is not necessarily one of full originary to copy, but of partial object to partial object—each of differing orders—and arguably that in tandem as a pair or as part of a multiplicity, each can also be seen as a virtual whole comprised of many parts—or, rather, part-ialities. The hologram could thus also be said to be a provisional three-dimensional partial representation that can also replicate the pre-existing partiality of a relation to the withdrawing object.

The usefulness of such a metaphor to digitality and subjectivity is as follows: a subject existing in connection to a diaphanous projection in digitality is engaged in a relation of partiality in which the projection both is and is not an attempt to “re-produce” the subject. The online persona of the multi-user domain (i.e. online game) or social media presence operates in a similarly relational and partial connection with the subject, such that the hologram and the body are partialities-in-relation. At the same time, the hologram is also a useful metaphor because it is a projection of a “recording,” a thing that exists and occurs over a duration of time and which must be sustained by some kind of projecting device and refractive surface. The single hologram is thus always bound up in both partiality, that one can only see, and temporality, too—that there is an ongoing relation between the projecting and projected substances. Given the ubiquity and importance of the online persona and identity, the figure of the hologram as partial and

ongoing representation seems a useful way to think through the dispersed and scattered “whole” self that can be seen in the amalgam of projecting body and projected image. The hologram of the digital persona enables the self to be a holographic self.

Yet, there is also the nature of the hologram or holographic projection itself, and here I believe it is more useful to think of the hologram as it does not yet exist: namely, the fictional hologram of the museum example I invoked above, or that which appears so frequently in speculative and science fiction. In those cases, the hologram is a translucent projection that appears to occupy space but does not. The technology to do that—and indeed, the physics—does not exist, but it is useful here to think of the well-known scene from *Star Wars* in which Princess Leia delivers a message through the use of a hologram. That flickering image foregrounds its own provisionality through a conspicuous projective beam of light. It stands for Leia in the absence of her body, not unlike other forms of communication—but unlike writing or sound or still images or even video, a hologram of this sort appears to stand in as three dimensions, occupying a place in the receiver’s space that it could not do otherwise. It is the specific technological and phenomenological character of the self-representation that is of import. The hologram obscures Leia’s surroundings and situations. It is partial, but it is also there and not, appearing to act as the subject as it foregrounds its own “fictiveness.” Yet, in that moment in the film, Leia’s entrance into the diegetic and narratological space is bound up in relation with the hologram—she is both hologram and body. To wit, the hologram is a partial representation of a partial subject-object, and it must be sustained as a relation between at least two points in a matrix that can be considered to form a virtual “whole”

—though it should be noted that the lack of a congruence may deliberately or inadvertently foreclose any notion of wholeness.

The holographic self is thus a metaphor I am using for thinking through notions of subjectivity as a relation between a bodily identity and a publicly visible representation. Though I will engage the idea of the holographic object and holographic subject in significantly more detail shortly, for now, the hologram as a flickering production of light that can, depending on one's approach, be said to be both "there" and "not there", is a figure I deploy to refer to the public online avatar as a phenomenally immaterial representation rooted in material networks that can stand for the subject in the absence of the bodily subject. The holographic self is a term both to think of the relation between this projection and the body as a figurative "whole," but also to foreground this relationality as foundational to any notion of the self I am using in this text. To wit, the holographic self is always a body and a representation operating in spatio-temporal relation, an amalgam that is not so much about the machine *in* the body as it is about the self as a constellation of body and machine(ic) representations.

As a result, I deploy the term holographic as an adjective that describes the capacity of an object or field to function as if it had reality effects, just as the hologram can appear to occupy space. I use holographic as a noun to refer to that relational space of the projection, such that the avatar or the online persona is defined as being of *the* holographic, which is to say, of digitality, but foregrounding the persistent, quasi-material, and psychological dimensions of the field that I will elucidate later in this introduction. A hologram is the term I deploy to connote a single instance of a digital

self-representation, such as an avatar in an online game or profile on a social networking service. A complete definition of the holographic self requires some more explication, but for now it suffices to say that it is the self conceived of as *either* a relation between a body and digital representation or representations, *or* a set of non-hierarchical relations amongst a variety of spatio-temporally scattered bodily and digital instantiations. What is clear, however, is that relationality between the bodily and digital is fundamental to any notion of the holographic self. I should also note as a clarifying aside that the term “holograph” is a form of a *document* and plays no role in this project.

The focus of this dissertation is thus to think through “holographic selfhood”—a form of both identity and subjectivity that takes as given the ground of this relationality between a bodily and an extra-bodily identity sustained in the digital virtual as a field—as a contemporary analytical lens for examining what occurs to subjectivity and identity in relation to digitality. A holographic self is ostensibly a historical consequence of certain technologies of self-representation and structures and economies of circulation. The questions I will therefore be asking and hoping to answer are as follows: 1) In the texts that I am examining, how is subjectivity conceived of and deployed in relation to the alternate or “virtual” space of the digital?; 2) In what way does the effect of this relation change if one asserts that there is an epistemological difference between a print-based virtuality and a digitally-based one?; 3) If digital virtuality offers some unique phenomena, then what is the effect of this uniqueness on narratives on self-actualization or becoming if and when one assumes that the digital virtual inflects processes of becoming?; 4) In this emphasis on becoming, what does the specific existence and wide

availability of an extra-bodily field of self-representation—i.e. a holographic field—do to the policing of the body and identity in relation to a horizon of aspiration?; 5) And finally, what might one suggest about a possible post-digital subjectivity in light of how holographic subjectivity functions in the texts I am examining? What becomes of subject position when subjectivity is positioned so multiply?

I will articulate my provisional responses to those questions and break down the reasoning behind the choice of literature in more detail later in this introduction. But before briefly outlining the novels selected for critical analysis and the way in which I will approach their use of the holographic self, I wish to lay out something like a small disclaimer. Though almost all projects of this kind change over time, the quickly shifting nature of both digital itself and digital studies meant that my original approach changed. For example, the idea of the digital as a distinct field came under wide scrutiny in the early 2010s, such as in the public work found on the website Cyborgology, particularly from scholars Nathan Jurgenson, Jenny Davis, David Banks, and Sarah Wanenchak. Additionally, some key texts such as J. Sage Elwell's "The Transmediated Self" and Alexander Galloway's *The Interface Effect* were released while the project was mostly written, and thus forced a kind of retroactive re-examination of the project, in which an initial emphasis upon a comparative reading of virtuality across history morphed to zero in on the holographic self as the right figure for a particular kind of (digital) virtual subjectivity that had ramifications for not only identity, but also how positionality or subject position was articulated in the texts. As such, while my initial argument was a polemic in favour of the holographic self as a kind of Lacanian machine for fulfilling

fantasy, it is now an examination of how two models of holographic subjectivity—one as an interface for realizing an ego-ideal as an expression of a desire for a post-positionality self; and another a reconfiguration of subjectivity such that it expresses a collapse of that dialectic into a less linear, less hierarchical matrix of relations—are deployed in these texts and what they might say about a potential post-digital subjectivity. Thus, what follows is still a linear argument that moves toward a conclusion, but a conclusion that, like many of the texts in this project, demands a retroactive look back at what preceded it.

In the first chapter, I examine Gautam Malkani's 2006 novel *Londonstani* and that text's rendering of a hybridized identity through both its language, but also the linear experience of reading the novel. The holographic self in this chapter is a structure in which the hologram or self-representation is an interface or mechanism for manifesting the fantasy of an ego-ideal. That latter term connotes an imaginary structure that posits the self-as-it-wishes-to-be as an aspirational pole. As such, the novel's invocation of an extra-bodily field of self-representation—the “space” of digital virtuality and texting—produces textually racial-ethnic identity as a malleable structure that, for certain subject positions, can be deployed as a mechanism for self-actualization, rather than only being a given socio-historical category. I argue that this deployment of a self as an avatar for both the reader and the protagonist functions as evocative of a digitally-inflected model of self-actualization. In order to ground the reading, I will contrast Malkani's text with Oscar Wilde's *A Picture of Dorian Gray*, to examine both the specific phenomenal and broader epistemological difference between an aesthetic “virtual” as a site onto which desire is

temporarily offloaded, and the virtual as a conduit through which to self-actualize in ways unique to modern, digital contexts.

In the second chapter, my main focus will be Hari Kunzru's *Transmission* and the eventual transformation within the text of the digital virtual as a site of subject formation to one of escape or quasi-transcendence from the constraints of the raced, policed body. In *Transmission*, the text's understanding of the (holographic) self goes through a transition. For much of the text the hologram or public-facing self, is a mechanism for phantasmatic transcendence of self and the positioned body; however, it shifts in the novel's coda to become a textual expression of the impossibility of locating a post-positionality or post-embodied self within contemporary material contexts, thus positing the concept of a holographic self itself as in a state of flux—one from psychoanalytic interface, to a non-hierarchical matrix of relational possibility. To locate this transformation in a historical context, I will read *Transmission* with Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* to highlight the contrast the imagination and physical "mirrors" as sites of aspirational self-representation, and the digital virtual as an analogous yet different aspirational plane or horizon that functions as a "end-goal" in relation to which the subject orients herself. The differing expression of fields of fantasy and resolution are predicated on differing conceptions of possibility and potential enabled by the digital virtual as socio-historical phenomenon—namely, the socio-historical fact of the internet and World Wide Web—in which possibility expresses the actualization of a predetermined process, and potential refers to an unrestrained notion of difference yet to become fully realized.

Finally, the third chapter examines how digitality as field impacts referentiality and taxonomy in William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*, and then focuses on how the breakdown between the referent and the digital signifier manifests in the representation of the subject in Teju Cole's *Open City*. As a function of this comparison, the holographic self—perhaps more easily identifiable in this case as a post-digital subject—must be reconceived as an internal set of relations rather than a dialectic between body and phantasmatic representation. The positioned self and the holographic self are thus put at odds, marking out a tension between a desire for post-positionality and a structure of recognition and ethics based upon singular, linear approaches to identity and positionality itself.

This structure aims to argue that within these texts the availability of a new discursive, phenomenological field for self-presentation has a distinctly “digital” effect on identity and subjectivity, inasmuch as it can evince two contradictory qualities at once. On the one hand, the capacity to project non-bodily representations of self into a social field of exchange opens up textual possibilities of self-representation in a field of social exchange that, in their relation to a body, provides trajectories of self-actualization in which the policing of a raced, sexed body is lessened by the intervention of an additional site of identity that can provisionally and temporarily provide socio-aesthetic grounds for an “escape” from constitutive categories of identity in order to at least textually express a desire to reconfigure them. This often affective relation between a digital, networked self-representation and body engenders a relation of self-change less constrained by the material limits of the body and discursive-ideological limits of the body-as-text. Put

another way, the digital virtual has real effect, because it has real affect. On the other hand, the structural organization of that field by and through capital can also render that arena of self-presentation as a further means to commoditize and objectify the subject. *Londonstani* and *Transmission* each base the trajectory of their narratives on the first half of this ambivalent pairing, and in doing so gesture toward the digital virtual as a site in and through which the policing effects on a body are diminished through the availability of a field in which signs of identity signify differently than does the body.

Meanwhile, as *Pattern Recognition* hovers in an impossible liminal space in which signification is both stable and not—thereby gesturing toward the very ambivalence I am elucidating—*Open City* does something quite different in its invocation of digitality: a meta-textual reading of the text not only produces parallels between the coercive effects of linear textual readings and online social networking services, but in so doing also produces the subject as object, such that a resultant hybrid is a self of networked relations in which the impossibility of locating the self at a specific spatio-temporal instantiation, therefore, destabilizes the primacy of the body as a guiding metaphor of self. The holographic self of *Open City* is thus less a binary relation between self and avatar, than a flattening out and opening up of relations amongst numerous versions.

Ultimately my overarching argument, however, is that in these narratives, holographic selfhood is linked to a desire to supersede the logic of a predominantly bodily self, whether that logic is an implied normative racial identity, the location of selfhood at the site of the body, or the location of selfhood under a single taxonomic or signifying identifier. In what is often a deliberate disjuncture between one form of self and a

(digital) other, the holographic self can either be a manifestation of an ego-ideal of the Imaginary or, in a quite different way, manifest a more rhizomatic notion of selfhood in the location of self at numerous spatio-temporal sites of the representation of subjectivity. In each narrative, however, there is a desire to escape a positioning of subjectivity in relation to identity-as-category or taxonomy, and each deploys a logic of the holographic self to posit the potential of a selfhood that verges on skittering away from positionality. As such, the holographic self may provide a useful way to think about a post-internet subjectivity, in which self-representations in an extra-bodily field of exchange form a core component of post-digital identity. Furthermore, the question of positionality itself—of the linkages between a subject position, a (raced, sexed, classed etc.) body, and a site of utterance within a system of socio-material exchange—may require re-consideration as ideas of subjectivity and identity begin to incorporate the non-bodily into the complex and still-crucial politics of the body.

However, in order to ground properly the literary reading that obviously forms the crux of this dissertation, I will need to spend some considerable time exploring a theoretical framework. Although all literary study requires a theoretical grounding, I argue that because of the historical novelty of digital technology, certain concepts and approaches cannot be taken for granted in the way that they might be in more established contextual literary frames, such as signification in deconstruction, or performativity in a feminist reading. As such, the following theoretical set-up is considerable. It seems, however, necessary to articulate firstly how I understand where digital technology fits

into an understanding of subjectivity; secondly, which framework of the digital I am deploying in relation to concepts such as the object, the self, the virtual, and others.

To do so, I will first turn to Heidegger to frame a relationship of self to technology. Then, I will clarify how I intend to use the term virtual by situating it in its theoretical context by turning to Gilles Deleuze, specifically his work in *Difference and Repetition*. Next, I will examine the “virtual” nature of the *imago* and its equivalents as a fundamental concept in the development of Western subjectivity, specifically by focusing on René Descartes and Walter Ong, paying specific attention to how the spatio-temporal qualities of techne of self inflect subject-object relations. I will then ground some basic theoretical understanding of digitality, particularly in terms of becoming a space of fantasy for the subject relying heavily on the work of André Nusselder in *Interface Fantasy: A Lacanian Cyborg Ontology*. I will then offer a somewhat contrary take to Nusselder’s explicitly Lacanian model of digitality by way of Alexander Galloway’s *The Interface Effect*, in order to think through how the digital may not only manifest “pre-existing” psychic structures, but also produce new ideological and material effects of its own.

Finally, I will explain my rationale for the historical and generic literary choices in order then to move on to a deeper fleshing out of the argument of the rest of the project. First, however, it is helpful to ground an understanding of the relationship between technology and the subject by turning to Heidegger’s seminal essay on the topic.

Subjects, Standing in Reserve as Objects

In the early twenty-first century, Heidegger's introductory point about technology is, at least comparatively speaking, obvious: "everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it. But we are delivered over to it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral; for this conception of it, to which today we particularly like to do homage, makes us utterly blind to the essence of technology" (Heidegger 4). Heidegger's approach to the essence of technology, however, is not a single ontological inquiry into the synchronic "whatness" of technology at a given moment; rather, to Heidegger, "essence ... is enduring as presence" (Lovitt 3)—that it is both the whatness and the function of something over time. Heidegger's eschewal of the expected ontological approach—that "technology is X"—stems from a desire to resist the "instrumental and anthropological definition of technology" (Heidegger 5) in which it is either a means to an end or a human activity. By contrast, Heidegger argues that "the essence of technology is by no means anything technological" (4) and instead cannot be found in a functional or utilitarian view. To do so would be to take one half of a pairing for a whole. That the writing in this dissertation is being crafted, cut and pasted, edited and so on using a computer is not simply a question of an end—that the completion of this written project that would be the same regardless of form—but a fraction of a multi-sided process of which the specific phenomenality of technology is one part.

The idea is taken further by Heidegger, however, specifically in that he thinks of technology in terms of both the Greek sense of *poesis* or "bringing-forth" (10) and *physis*,

which is “the arising of something from out of itself” (10). The emphasis on the term *poesis* highlights Heidegger’s focus upon technology as *techne*, i.e. a skill or art that, in the act of creation, reveals or, to use Heidegger’s term, unconceals. The terminology is arguably a rhetorical tactic meant to emphasize the contingent, non-linear nature of apprehension. Thought of this way, technology is “no mere means” but “a way of revealing” (Heidegger 12), a simultaneous production of an object or an idea that, in its very instantiation, “gathers in advance the aspect and the matter [of an object] ... with a view to the to the finished thing envisioned as its construction” (Heidegger 13).

What is of relevance to my project particularly, however, is that Heidegger asserts that machine-technology and modern physics—the latter of which we can take as a stand-in for the modern understanding of the mechanics of reality—are mutually dependent: “Modern physics, as experimental, is dependent upon technical apparatus and upon progress in the building of apparatus” (Heidegger 14). This is to say that one’s apprehension of a tree is fundamentally changed when one becomes aware of the functioning of its mitochondria or of the photosynthetic reaction. Perhaps more importantly, however, is that witnessing a forest is different when one is holding an axe than when one is commanding an army of bulldozers. It is not possible ends that are different but rather, that the shape and nature of reality for a subject that has changed. To use Heidegger’s now-famous example, “the hydroelectric plant is not built into the Rhine River... Rather the river is damned up into the power of the plant. What the river is now... derives from out of the essence of the power station” (16). It is modern technology

and its capacity to reshape at such scale specifically that Heidegger designates in his term “Enframing” (19).

Heidegger, in typically unhelpful fashion, defines Enframing as “the gathering together of that setting-upon which sets upon man, i.e., challenges him forth, to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing reserve” (20). But when he links its German root, *Ge-stell*, with *her-* and *dar-stellen*—producing and presenting—the nature of the term becomes clearer. If modern technology Enframes, then it produces and presents the object as ordered into a system of understanding that “reveals the real as standing-reserve” (21). There is a mutually constitutive moment—or ongoing series of moments—of emergence that renders the object “seeable” or “understandable” within a particular, interlinked material-ideological system that also shapes and constitutes the seeing subject. How we relate to technology is thus a question that “always comes too late” (24). It is not that the apprehension of Being is about seeing the inner truth of objects; rather, it is about the revelation of the ongoing interconnectedness of the systems that constitute the real-as-revealed.

Yet if, as Heidegger argues, that “Enframing threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth” (28), then one of the risks of the (comparative) ubiquity of digital technology is that it might be bound up in relations that pre-empt or foreclose various other modes of existence. Even before one arrives at various ontological possibilities, there are many ways in which the web, for example, may be helping to concentrate and accelerate the commodification of subjects, or the precession of

simulacra, or any other number of arguably negative late capitalist tendencies. If this is the case, then it is not because the digital remains disconnected and somehow unreal, but because it is one of ways in which the subject is stitched into reality.

The potential concentration and collapse of phenomenal fields into one another is at the centre of the critique of “digital dualism.” The idea is meant to echo the critique of Cartesian dualism, which argues that a strict division between mind and body has numerous consequent discursive effects that not only render subjectivity immaterial (in contradistinction to the material politics of the body), but also deny its very spatio-temporal-ness. The term digital dualism was coined by Nathan Jurgenson and he defines it as a perspective “that views the digital and physical as separate spheres” (85), such that social media displace “‘real’, offline, and face-to-face connections with online, ‘virtual connection’” (Jurgenson 85). By extension, such an approach also sees digitality as a space within which information flows freely, national boundaries could be overcome, expertise and authority could be upended” while also “fixing the oppressive realities such as skin color, physical ability, resource scarcity as well as time and space constraints” (Jurgenson 85).

By contrast, Jurgenson proposes the term “augmented reality,” which he suggests refers to “a larger conceptual perspective that views our reality as the by-product of the enmeshing of the on and offline” (84). The term itself is less than ideal, as it implies there is an accessible “unaugmented” reality that existed prior to digitality. Nonetheless, the notion that “social media users are being trained to experience the world always as a potential photo, tweet, check-in or status update” (Jurgenson 85) clearly points to the

idea that digital technologies are not an alternate field, but are enmeshed with materiality in an inextricable way. The existence of such technologies is not another way to achieve an end, but rather a way of rendering the world as, if you might excuse it, standing reserve for the status update. When Heidegger points out that “the bringing forth of the true into the beautiful was called *techne*” (34), the connection between *techne* of different sorts emphasises the mutual relationship between art-as-technology, technology as machines, and revealing or unconcealing that which was both already and not already *there*. As such, if Heidegger’s focus is upon resisting the instrumentalization of *techne*, instead focusing upon technology as Enframing, then any attention paid to digitality must also think through the specific nature of this co-emergence of revealing in which the subject and digitality “bring forth” each other in particular ways and in relation to particular structures.

The phenomenological inextricability of digital and material is, however, paradoxically underpinned by what one might call an epistemological extricability. While there is obviously no hard, clear *differend*-like break between the fields, their very difference sustains their enmeshment, the very contrast in the object that can exist at one spatio-temporal location and the one that can exist at many locations, yet retain the same singular taxonomic classification. The social media profile simultaneously accessed by tens of, hundreds of, or thousands of, persons scattered across the globe that in turn inflects the self-image of a subject walking down the street is enabled by this ambivalent, simultaneous overlap and separation that, on the one hand, posits a difference between

the body as object, and online presence as discursive object and, on the other, their unity “within” the “same” subjectivity.

Such a view is underpinned by Heidegger’s point that modern technology Enframes such that it re-constitutes an ongoing relationship to reality. One’s sense of public and publics, for example, changes radically when there is an analogous textual-aesthetic field that operates (partially) as a public square. Carried along with such logic, however, is that if the socio-historical phenomenon of the digital virtual offers new possibilities for the subject, then it also offers new possibilities for capitalism, surveillance, hatred, oppression, harassment, violence and any other number of modes of desubjectification. The intensification of late capitalism is also a mechanism of Enframing. A variety of possibilities are enabled, for good and bad, and Enframing as a phenomenon specific to modern technology in which questions of scope and scale mean that technology-as-techne is engaged in an ongoing reconstitution of the subject and the subject-ive real in relation to techne and its related processes.

An analysis of digital technology and Enframing seems instead useful to point to the ways in which the web has inflected the dialectic between subjectivity and its (self-) representation in the imagination, aesthetics and the public sphere. The first two chapters of this project will focus on what I believe to be the mechanisms by which these changes at least *express a desire* for a kind of “post-identity” politics of the body in which the virtual representation of self as a part of the self at least begins to engage the material consequences of the mass availability of a public self. The third chapter, on the other hand, aims to complicate this view of “exceeding” the policing of the body by framing the

generative nature of the digital virtual in terms of the coercive structures of texts of ideology. First, however, some consideration of what “virtual” might mean to the already “virtual” field of aesthetics is required.

Actual Virtuality and the Ontological Virtual

The virtual has always implied a binary of sorts. Even a basic dictionary definition deliberately pulled from the older *Webster’s Third International* edition—that the virtual is “of, or relating to, or possessing a power of acting without the agency of matter”—invokes a division between a material reality and the appearance of that reality. In *Interface Fantasy: A Lacanian Cyberontology*, André Nusselder states that Thomas Aquinas invoked the virtual “as a synonym of Aristotelian potentiality, indicating that the effect is already contained (‘present’) in the cause” (33). As such, to call something virtual is always to mark out a series of dichotomies: between the object and its representation, the material and the ephemeral, the real and unreal.

In contemporary times, however, the virtual has acquired another meaning—namely, the “virtual reality that computers generate” (Nusselder 35), something early computer studies posited in the terms of the fictional worlds of multi-user online games. Yet, in what is perhaps an emblem of how fast the field shifts, as Mark Poster notes in “Theorizing Virtual Reality” from *The Information Subject*, the term “quickly spread beyond computer-generated immersive environments to include first certain communication facilities on the Internet ... and then on to the Internet more broadly” (119). As digitally-mediated day-to-day processes of materiality, communication and

sociality started to become more common, virtual reality came to refer to the perceived distinction between a discursive field that existed through and by technology and an immanent material one, a sort of meta-pairing of sign and referent.

The production of virtual reality as a field evokes another binary, one which doesn't simply posit the virtual thing as a less real corollary, but two realities, one material, one digital. There are, however, many good reasons to resist this notion, particularly from a sociological perspective. As Evgeny Morozov points out in *To Save Everything, Click Here*, his critique of techno-utopianism, this view is one which relies on the ideas that "online connections are somehow inferior to offline ones" (153), and that as a result, the discursive and experiential field enabled by digital technology is less real, less good, less true. The obvious problem is that this dualistic approach renders the social connections, knowledge, and activity in digital fields lower in an abstract hierarchy that does not hold up to critique. As Morozov argues, the criticisms of digital dualism "fit within a broader intellectual critique, advanced most persuasively by historians and sociologists of science, holding that the splits between humanity and technology and nature and society are themselves artificial and have a history" (153). That said, critiquing such ideas does not mean one cannot read the expression of digital dualism symptomatically and within a socio-historical and intellectual context. After all, one can profoundly disagree with Kantian ideals of subjectivity, yet still find very fruitful readings of literature and sociological phenomena that express just such notions of the subject. For example, long before the digital dualist debate erupted, technology and literary scholar Katherine Hayles examined and criticised the shift toward disembodiment in technology

studies such that material reality was de-emphasized in favour of abstract notions of “the virtual.”

In *How we Became Posthuman*, Hayles argues that Information-Age cybernetics have gone through three stages: homeostasis, reflexivity, and virtuality. In homeostasis, which Hayles argues was the first phase of post-war understanding of machines, the feedback loop was key, and information was conceived of as a relationship between signal and noise and a circular sense of causality (Hayles 16, Fig 1.1). Machines were mechanistic input-output systems. Next came reflexivity, which is “the movement whereby that which has been used to generate a system is made... to become part of a system” (Hayles 8). Put more simply, it concerns the symbiotic production of an informational field in which the creation of something like computer code as a base for the representation itself produces “digital information” as a field.

In this exposition of a relationship to information, Hayles then argues that the subsequent effect is the third phase, or virtuality, which she states is “the cultural perception that material objects are interpenetrated by information patterns” (13-14). It’s a key notion of digitality, because it clearly articulates a doubled vision, the perception of an object, but also the sense of its potentially many digital corollaries. It’s true that, as Hayles points, out this definition “implies we participate in the cultural perception that information and materiality are conceptually distinct and that information is in some sense more essential, more important, and more fundamental than reality” (18). But Hayles is clearly invested in a critique of this dualism, seeking to re-inject embodiment

into this discourse. She points out this binary to highlight the overemphasis upon the digital corollary, at the expense of the body.

The perspective is just as fruitful, however, if we consider Hayles notion of “interpenetration” in relation to the body-as-object. Hayles states that cybernetics’ influence on subjectivity partly happens because “conceptual fields evolve similarly to material culture, in part because concept and artefact engage each other in continuous feedback loops” (Hayles 15). Another way to think of this claim is in terms of the subject perceiving the physical object: there are always at least two hermeneutic modes at work, the temporally immediate, and the imaginative-discursive, “each” of which can obviously be splintered into many. Coming-to-terms with the object—or the subject-as-object—is thus always a process of a doubled view of informatics and sense perception, a phenomenon importantly multiplied by the textual and imagistic representations of self made available on and through digital media. In a sense, digital virtuality in its historical context foregrounds an idea that came before: that the object, or indeed the body, is not a given, accessible thing, but something existing in suspended relation materially and ideologically rooted practices of hermeneutics. This emphasis upon hermeneutics as a mode of self-relation—namely, a mode of interpretation between the self and the self-representation—is something to which I will return in the conclusion in terms of the work of Alexander Galloway.

The question must be asked, however: What sense of ontology underpins this doubled view? It is a question that I suggest must be answered by a brief but vital (pun fully intended) foray into the work of philosopher Gilles Deleuze. Because of its capacity

to evoke a kind of “immateriality”—i.e., its so-called fictional quality, in which one can produce visual-textual manifestations of “things that don’t exist”—the digital virtual can be a space for thinking through, or at least around, difference. On the other hand, the web is clearly not some sort of mystical space free of ideology or referentiality. Just as the referent is always the present-yet-absent instigation(-but-not) of signification, all digital objects must be rendered into pre-existing symbolic orders for subjects to interact with them. The digital is never a neutral field, and that means its epistemological status as “virtual” is constantly being negotiated as it vacillates between being different and repeating what is.

Deleuze, of course, meant something slightly different in *Difference and Repetition*. As Smith and John claim in their nuanced, sophisticated Stanford Encyclopaedia entry on the philosopher, “Deleuze's target in *Difference and Repetition* is the subordination of difference to identity.” Deleuze asserts the necessity of thinking of difference as a metaphysical category that pre-exists individual objects. But more than that, “Difference is not and cannot be thought in itself, so long as it is subject to the requirements of representation” (Deleuze, *Difference* 262).

The subjection of difference, Deleuze argues, initially begins with the Platonic urge to subject objects—and thus the world—to a moral hierarchy, so that “what is condemned in the figure of the simulacra is the state of free, oceanic differences, of nomadic distributions and crowned anarchy, along with all that malice which challenges both the notion of the model and of the copy” (265). Deleuze’s critique is, in one way, about the originary and the copy and the resulting hierarchical structures that not only

govern objects, but epistemology too. Deleuze's ideological investments are thus made clear, but even more so when he suggests that "these postulates culminate in the position of an identical thinking subject, which functions as a principle of identity for concepts in general ... [which also] brings to the concept its subjective concomitants: memory, recognition and self-consciousness" (*Difference* 265-266). To wit, a thinking (rational, Enlightenment) subject also institutes an anthropomorphic view of so-called objective reality, but also a view of the subject as a linear accretion of a unified entity.

In opposition to identity, Deleuze posits the Idea. He suggests that "Ideas thus defined possess no actuality" (*Difference* 279); rather, they are ongoing processes of difference that, rather than manifesting in a specific spatio-temporal actualization, remain as a non-actualized set of relations, always in potential. Crucially, the difference here is Deleuze's critique of a causal referential relationship in which "the possible and the real resemble each other, but not the virtual and the actual" (*Difference* 279); to wit, if there is a necessary relationship between the possible and the real, then there is *not* a similarly linear, necessary connection between the virtual and a specific actualization. Within Deleuze's metaphysics, these two fields are of different ontological orders. The virtual, if "fully objective," lacks the intensive nature of the actual, its strangely provisional-ontological quality—i.e. the latter's existence as a productive creative act, not a causal relationship that thus results in an identity that, so to speak, always pre-existed.

As a result, Deleuze has this to say about the place of the virtual: "In this sense the virtual is by no means a vague notion, but one which possesses full objective reality; it cannot be confused with the possible, which lacks reality. As a result, whereas the

possible is the mode of identity of concepts within representation, the virtual is the modality of the differential of the heart of Ideas” (*Difference* 279). Perhaps most interesting is how Deleuze reframes the dialectic between the identity and the possible:

It is as though everything has two odd dissymmetrical and dissimilar “halves,” the two halves of the symbol, each dividing itself in two: an ideal half submerged in the virtual and constituted on the one hand by differential relations and on the other by corresponding singularities; an actual half constituted on the one hand by the qualities actualising those relations and on the other by the parts actualising those singularities. (*Difference* 279)

This fascinating notion tries to think outside of causal relationship between the always-absent transcendent and the actual, and instead attempts to impose the non-linear structure of the rhizome upon the ongoing subjective construction of reality. The opposite approach is one in which one “retrospectively or retroactively ‘projected’ a fictitious image of the real back into the possible” (Smith 36), a situation in which there is a necessary and causal relationship between that which exists and that which is possible.

Considering that the focus of my project is on the digital virtual in the form of the World Wide Web as a socio-historical phenomenon, however, a rather sticky problem emerges. In Deleuze’s thought, the virtual is an ontological and transcendental field from which specific spatio-temporal manifestations become actual. The digital virtual, on the other hand, is a phenomenal field—or, if you will, an “actual” field. Granted, the latter is not phenomenal in the same way as is the material; a three-dimensional digital tree is experienced both “on” and “through” a flat, two-dimensional screen—as it is also

sustained by the material processes of computation and electricity, amongst others—but is nonetheless experienced by an embodied avatar or gaze. Thus Deleuze’s virtual and the digital virtual are clearly two different epistemological categories. The digital virtual as it exists is quite separate and, given the emphasis upon ideological referentiality in the common use of digital technology, possibly even antithetical to Deleuze’s views of the virtual. There is a contradiction at work: one where the virtual is a field that exists beyond possibility, and another where the digital virtual is precisely the kind of “possibility” that Deleuze seeks to eschew with his definition of the virtual. That contradiction is specifically examined by Brian Massumi in his articulation of the issue in the chapter “On the Superiority of the Analog” in his influential *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. There, Massumi quite forcefully argues that “the medium of the digital is possibility, not virtuality, and not even potential” (137), and that further “nothing is more destructive for the thinking and imagining of the virtual than equating it with the digital” (137). Massumi’s argument rests on the idea that the relation of code to digital expression is one of possibility, not potentiality.

But Massumi is not a pessimist when it comes digitality. Rather, he argues that the following about the hope of openness in digitality:

Take hypertext. All possible links in the system are programmatically prearrayed in its architecture. This has lead some critics to characterize it not as liberating but as downright totalitarian. While useful to draw attention to the politics of the possible, calling hypertext totalitarian is inaccurate. What it fails to appreciate is that the coding is not the whole story: that the digital always circuits into the

analog. The digital, a form of inactuality, must be actualized. That is its quotient of openness. The freedom of hypertext is in the openness of its analog reception. The hypertext reader does something that the co-presence of alternative states in code cannot ever do: serially experience effects, accumulate them in an unprogrammed way, in a way that intensifies, creating resonances and interference patterns moving through the successive, linked appearances. (138)

In a sense, one might think about the Deleuzian virtual as a field of *ontological* generativity, while the digital virtual is a field for socio-historically rooted generativity—the crucial difference being that while the former is *inherently* generative, the latter is only conditionally so, and indeed, is frequently not generative at all, only “re-productive.” As such, the digital virtual can be considered as a “new” arena for human action that can also replicate, manifest, and even concentrate pre-existing structures and epistemologies, marking out its “newness” as a set of intertwined technological, phenomenal, and socio-historical conditions, rather than a newness of an ontological or necessarily epistemological nature. Of particular import in Massumi’s articulation, however, is the emphasis upon relationality between a generative field and a person, and the capacity of that shifting, rhizomatic field to produce unexpected events.

As a result, for the purposes of my project, I will define use the term virtual in the following ways. *Virtuality* will refer to the condition by which a phenomenal or material field, whether specifically referring to an object or subject, exists in relation to a field of ontological possibility or generativity. *The virtual* refers to that ontological field. *Virtual* as a descriptor or adjective invokes the doubled view of the object or subject as always a

pairing or binary of the thing and its corollary in various possibilities of representation. And finally, *the digital virtual* will refer to the socio-historical phenomenon of what have come to be referred to as contemporary digital virtual technologies: the internet, which is the infrastructure for information communication technologies; the World Wide Web, which refers to the manifestation of that infrastructure in web sites and applications on devices with screens; and also to internet-enabled games which produce fictional digital arenas of play. As such, I will entail a doubled view in which the digital virtual both does and does not reflect the Deleuzian virtual: on the one hand, it discursively stands for a field of generativity; on the other, it is a specific socio-historic phenomenon bound up in relations of capital, materiality, and contemporary ideologies. In fact, it is this very tension between the digital virtual's capacity to re-iterate existing structures and its "potential potentiality" to engender or demand new modes of self or hermeneutics that forms the core problematic of this project.

In a sense, then, the question becomes how the latter of these definitions—the digital virtual—changes the pre-existing and philosophically more common notion of virtuality and, by extension, what one might then say about virtuality and the holographic self in relation to the subject and subject position. Specifically, if the aim of this project is to examine how literature reacts to the digital virtual's effect on subjectivity and positionality—partly through an understanding of earlier literature's understanding of virtuality relied on aesthetics-as-technology—what is necessary is to examine how and where digitality fits into a broader understanding of virtuality as a philosophical

category—and, further, how those changes impact the holographic subject and its relation to positionality.

An (Already) Virtual Self

Among the few things that one can say about subjectivity with any reasonable degree of certainty is that it is relational. In *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler argues that “subjected to gender, but subjectivated by gender, the ‘I’ neither precedes nor follows the process of this gendering, but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves” (7). There is always an outside to a subject, an exterior set of “conditions of its emergence and operation” (Butler 7) that operate in relation to an inalienably interior experience of subjectivity. Similarly, when Althusser claims in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” that “all ideology hails or interpellates individuals as concrete subjects” (95), he also relies on a similar inside-outside dialectic. When the subject responds to the hail “yes, it is really me!” (Althusser 99), it also “then emerges that the interpellation of individuals as subjects presupposes the existence of Unique and central Other Subject” (Althusser 99). Even accounting for Althusser’s too-totalizing, binary articulation of monolithic structures like “Ideology” or “the Subject,” the relational structure between an inside and outside is not only common but seemingly inevitable.

I say inevitable because one always apprehends the subjectivity of an other and, in some part, one’s own, as a kind of “object”: as a material body, an image in a mirror, a text written in the first person, a photograph, a virtual avatar, etc. As such, an understanding of the functioning of subjectivity also seems intimately bound up in the structures and

practices of representation in which the interior experience of subjectivity encounters the material object(s) of selfhood. This is to say that in the temporal and experiential processes of becoming, the space of the hyphen between subject-object can often be one mediated by representation, of both the self to itself and others. Part of being a subject is not only the obvious inevitability of appearing as an object to others, but is also about appearing as an object to oneself.

What then is the role of representation in the constitution of the subject? It seems an important question to answer as that relation between subject and representation is key to any understanding of a “holographic” subject. One might argue that in the various conceptions of the subject, a descriptive metaphor exists that is as equally spatial as it is mimetic: of an interior aspect of subjectivity orienting itself in relation to an exteriority that is as simultaneously inaccessible as it is constitutive. If one basic paradox of subjectivity is its simultaneous interiority *and* its reliance on an exterior, then representation is one of the modes through which the tension between the two is mediated, whether that representation is a process of material production (a text, an image, the body as mediated as either) or the imagination. If we are always in the process of becoming ourselves, then the subject is constantly moving toward the self/representation of both what it and external forces compel it to be—whether that “wish is “voluntary,” conscious or available to the subject, or not.

It stands to reason, then, that aesthetics would grapple with that spatially charged rhetoric. In *Multiplying Worlds: Romanticism, Modernity, and the Emergence of Virtual Reality*, Peter Otto makes the case that this relation of self and alternate space is

something that came to prominence during the Romantic period, an era in art which also focused explicitly upon the interiority of self. Otto's primary argument is that the virtual as a "space of emergence of the new, the unthought, the unrealized" (7) is fundamental to Romantic art, and that "the contemporary [twenty-first century] cultural force of virtual reality is to a surprising degree shaped by assumptions about the virtual, and the relation between real and illusory/fictional worlds, that first emerge during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries" (7). Otto argues that a change in the relation between viewing subject and world manifests through the panorama, "a building, optical environment, and circular painting that... was almost a synecdoche for the modern" (20). Looking at Caspar David Friederich's *The Wanderer above a Sea of Mists* in which a figure stands, back turned, in front of a sea of mists and mountains, Otto argues that the painting sets up a "relation of domination implied by his elevation above that world" (20). The wanderer himself is the "relational centre" (Otto 20) for the viewer, a kind of proxy by which "the picture [that] re-presents the actual world for an autonomous subject, has been displaced by the relations constitutive of a virtual world, namely the interaction between the observer, the light that emanates from the landscape, and the impressions left by vanishing substance" (Otto 20-21). The emphasis is on a doubling in which "the virtual world opened for the Wanderer by the sea of mists mirrors the virtual world conjured for the spectator by the painting" (22), and the notion becomes especially important when one considers that the panorama proper—the circular painting—was a "hyper-realistic illusion" (Otto 24) that can, in the viewer's mind, come to stand for the "actual" panorama of the city. The panorama is also "a remarkable *catalogue* of the

elements contained by late eighteenth-century London” (Otto 39, my emphasis) and as such, is a synecdochic representation of “a city.”

Such notions of representation obviously get at the heart of mimesis itself, an issue of great concern during the Romantic period. Taking up what Plato first raised in the tenth book of *The Republic*, Otto suggests that the Romantics “were concerned with the status and effect of fictional worlds, with their ability temporarily to eclipse the actual world and to rouse the emotions of those who enter them” (81). It is an issue that becomes bound up in the dual sense of representation: to depict and to stand or speak for, and it is an idea, I suggest, that is crucial to understanding where digital technology fits into the process of subject formation. To witness a representation of the self—as an image in a photo, a character in a text—is both to come-to-terms with the self as an object, and also to have the representation or depiction stand for or speak for within a certain economy of signifiers. Arguably, this standing for the self to the self is both a process of the (mis)recognition—or, since it is pre-significatory, miscognition—of the mirror stage, and also a mechanism by which one might conceive of the subject as process of “self-emergence” between various instantiations. Yet, in order to understand this process of “self-interpellation” more clearly—the mechanism by which one is hailed by the contextualized image of the self—the process of self and self-image should first be examined in a foundational text of an understanding of Western subjectivity.

I Think, Therefore I Self-Represent

The process of subject-formation occurs through a constant process of self-reflection and self-representation, an ongoing relation between an always-already multiple self and a multiplicity of projections of the self-to-come and the self-as-it-should-be. While all of those spheres, including the imagination, are always-already social, I am interested in the possibility of differing technological media producing a space in which the subject can “exceed,” distort, and affect its normative interpellation with socio-discursive structures. What does the holographic subject do to normativity in relation to sites of subjectivity?

In order to elucidate that idea it seems useful to return to some key texts that help frame the processes by which the “technology” of self-representation affects subject-formation. To that end, I will seek to contrast the construction of the projected subject in Descartes’s *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations on First Philosophy*, and Walter Ong’s analysis of orality in *Orality and Literacy*, particularly in terms of a differing vision of what I will call the “epistemological priorness” of either the self or the social. The pair of related comparisons I will articulate are these: First, in as much as all discussions of subjectivity are about the self and sociality, orality overemphasises the latter over the former, while print inverts this emphasis. This understanding of how the self is located in relation to an exterior forms a fertile ground for thinking through what the digital virtual does to the conception and the experience of the relation of self to social. Secondly, if technology allows for aesthetic representations of the self beyond the body-as-text, when literature engages the question of self-presentation to others, it reveals something about its

respective anxieties over that ability of technology to obscure and affect that self-presentation. As a result, that obfuscatory effect is often one that circulates around questions of normative values and social stricture.

Ong's *Orality and Literacy* articulates some fundamental aspects of the relationship between the spatial and temporal dimensions of language and the position of the self in relation to where and when knowledge is located. At the root of almost all aspects of orality, Ong argues, is the evanescence of sound and the attendant need for thought to be more directly tied to temporally limited intersubjective relations than it is in literate culture. When the only available form of processing and developing new thought is through speech-in-time, orality has specific spatio-temporal constraints:

Suppose a person in an oral culture would undertake to think through a particular complex problem and would finally manage to articulate a solution which itself is complex, consisting, let us say, of a few hundred words.... In the total absence of any writing, there is nothing outside the thinker, no text, to enable him or her to produce the same line of thought again or even to verify whether he or she has done so or not. (Ong 33)

Importantly, what Ong suggests is that in primary oral cultures, speech—and by extension, a thing called knowledge—is partly located in a shared metaphorical space one might loosely call the social, suspended in a kind of potentiality between subjects as part of a given social group.

In orality, the relationship between knowledge and the subject is therefore one set up for immediacy and what is at least the appearance of immanence. But Ong suggests

that “writing separates the knower from the known and thus sets up conditions for objectivity, in the sense of personal disengagement or distancing” (55), while “for an oral culture, learning or knowing means achieving close, empathetic, communal identification with the known” (56). It is an overly romantic view, one that perhaps conflates temporal immediacy for a kind of “ontological” concordance of subject and object. What is important, however, is that Ong insists that writing as a technology reconstitutes the relationship of knower and known by putting knowledge in a form that at the very least *appears* to be independent of the social context that produced it.

This, after all, is what Barthes seems to also suggest in “The Death of the Author.” When Barthes argues that in writing “all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes it” (2), he is referring precisely to writing’s capacity to appear to function beyond the subject. It is that capacity of writing to produce a relationship between signifier and signified that elides the role of the speaking subject. But another strand running through Barthes’s essay is that of the book itself, a bounded—if obviously porous, intertextual—“whole.” If the idea challenged is that “The Author [is]... always conceived as the past of his own book” (2), then the status of the book is itself crucial. Though Barthes obviously makes the argument to challenge the notion of authorial intent—that the author is no longer “the subject of which his book is the predicate” (4)—his argument is also dependent on the epistemological status of the book as it circulates within a discourse of the constitution of knowledge. It is the materiality and historicity of the book-as-object—of its capacity as an object to exist beyond a subject—that underpins Barthes’s argument. Even though the “book itself is only a tissue of signs, a lost, infinitely

remote imitation” (5), that remoteness allows for the narrator (one’s guide into the text) to express ideas and thoughts in which language function discursively and materially in the absence of a writing subject.

This is to say that the capacity of writing to function independently of an author also produces a division between subject and object that itself produces a fold of interiority. Conversely, this interiority is often lacking in oral cultures. Pointing to Marxist psychologist A.R. Luria, Ong suggests that the oral-literate divide can produce a difference in the conception of the self. Luria suggests that literacy creates “an unregulated individualistic economy” (60), in part because of the manner in which writing assists in the creation of interiority. As Ong argues:

Luria’s illiterates had difficulty in articulate self-analysis. Self-analysis requires a certain demolition of situational thinking. It calls for the isolation of the self, around which the entire lived world swirls for each individual person, removal of the center of every situation from that situation enough to allow the center, the self, to be examined and described. (64, sic)

Luria’s subjects’ responses to certain questions—What sort of person are you, what’s your character like, how would you describe yourself?—seem to indicate not so much a lack of self-awareness, but a different manner of positioning the self: “I came here from Uch-Kurgan, I was very poor, and now I’m married and have children”; “We behave well, if we were bad people, no-one would respect us”; and perhaps most tellingly, “What can I say about my own heart? How can I talk about my character? Ask others; they can tell you about me. I myself can’t say anything” (Ong 64).

In primary orality, the spatio-temporal dimensions of language—its when and its where—produce an experience of selfhood that renders the interior/exterior dichotomy somewhat differently than in print cultures. While in both orality and literacy, an Althusserian-Butlerian sense of discursive interpellation reigns, in which the subject is constituted by a network of discursive relations as it itself instantiates through a series of discursively limited performative gestures, in orality this process relies more heavily on the socio-discursive.

So, one might tentatively assert that the metaphorical “position” of knowledge in relation to the subject has an effect on the process of self-identification. The spatio-temporal constraints of orality can produce a phenomenon in which a centrifugal social and signifiatory effect is exerted upon both language and subjects such that individuals register their identity in a manner that prioritizes and emphasizes the external, social view, and de-emphasizes the interior and introspective. Articulating orality’s effect on subjectivity in such a fashion provides one possible basis from which to examine the literary representation of subject-constitution in a manner that engages how characters locate their identity, through what spatio-temporal and technological mechanisms and, as a result, which modes of self-representation and their attendant effects on subjectivity are invoked.

Yet, it also seems beneficial to understand the inverse of the oral positioning of the subject—what Ong would call a “literate” mode of self-identification. It is here, then, that I turn to French philosopher, René Descartes. In his texts, the function of the imagination is analogous to both the aesthetic and the virtual in that it forms a metaphorically

“separate” space for the spatial and temporal construction of Descartes’s notion of the self. In doing so, it foregrounds the position of the visual and the imaginative in the process of subject-constitution, which in turn points out that the “virtual functioning” of both aesthetics and the virtual technologies—by which I mean their mental and spatio-temporal relationship to the subject—are not new *per se*, but are modified forms of the self-interpellative act of subject-constitution, an act that relies inherently upon representation.

While Descartes forms an unexpectedly useful ground for thinking about the virtual-like function of art and the imagination, he also is a helpfully emblematic articulation of the history of Western subjectivities themselves. As Dalia Judovitz states in *Subjectivity and Representation in Descartes*:

Descartes contribution to modern [Western] philosophy is characterized in terms of his pursuit of truth interpreted as certainty. This new definition of truth breaks with the traditional interpretation of truth (from Plato to the neoplatonists) that equated it with beauty and goodness. Descartes defined philosophical truth in the most narrow sense possible, concerned as he is with the conditions of interpretation of truth as certitude, that is objective representation, which relies on the implicit elaboration of a theory of subjectivity for its success. (x)

This is to say that while any sort of comprehensive view of modern Western subjectivity is of course impossible to articulate, Descartes’s rhetorical and narrative technique is useful for contrast for not only poststructuralist discourses of subjectivity, which are often

deployed in understanding the influence of the web and virtuality on subjectivity, but also the versions of selfhood that potentially come after those.

When Descartes self-deprecatingly asserts that “my plan has never been more than to try to reform my own thoughts” (*Discourse* 9), he suggests at the same time that his plan to create a rigorous method of deduction as an example, stating that “if my work having sufficiently pleased me, I show it to you here as a model” (*Discourse* 9). It is one of the first instances where Descartes uses the language of representation. Descartes shows the reader as he shows himself the various “scenes” or “images” that make up his argument. Interestingly, Descartes’s first of his rules for avoiding error is as follows:

Never to accept anything as true I did not evidently know to be so; that is, carefully to avoid precipitous judgement and prejudice; and to include nothing more in my judgement *than what presented itself to my mind* with such clarity and distinctness that I would have no occasion to put it in doubt. (47, emphasis mine)¹¹

Key here is that the object of perception modally *presents* (*se présenterait*) itself—which is to say that even before Descartes begins, he has instituted a distinction between subject and object such that an object-ive reality that pre-exists the subject impinges on the subject.

But by the time Descartes has arrived at his famous *cogito* formulation, the literary construction of this “presentation” becomes significant. It is then that the philosopher states: “Then, examining with attention what I was, I saw that I can that I could pretend [*feindre*] that I had no body and there was no world and no place where I was” (47).¹² The

obvious language to pay attention to would be Descartes's use of *feindre*, in that he is constructing a vision for himself of an imagined scene, "pretending" to have no body. But it is the "voyant/seeing/I saw" that is key to the intriguing meta-textual construction: the reader witnessing Descartes witness a vision of a thing that cannot be seen, a scene which echoes Otto's emphasis upon the character in a painting as a proxy for the observer.

The importance of this small but crucial moment is well articulated by Dalia Judovitz: "It is ironic that it is precisely Descartes's formal definition of subjectivity that has hidden from view the activity of representation, its mechanisms and structures. The emergence of the Cartesian subject supplanted its own origins in order to appear *ex nihilo* as a representation no longer belonging to the order of representation" (38). It is perhaps helpful here to bring in Matthew Clark's 2010 *Narrative Structures and the Language of the Self*. As Clark notes of the narrative nature of Descartes's two most prominent works:

Descartes's autobiographical narrative creates a curious doubleness in his subjectivity: on the one hand, there is the *I* that tells the story, the *I* that is René Descartes... But in addition to this physical and historical *I*, there is also the *I* of the cogito, the 'I think, therefore I am': this *I* is merely a thinking substance, with no history and no characteristics. This self would be the same no matter where it is.

(14)

Such an approach to subjectivity in which the self at least attempts to appear self-constituting is what Clark calls the reflexive self, a term he arrives at through a careful reading of Descartes's use of pronouns. As he suggests, in Descartes "the grammatical form of the solitary but self-regarding self is the reflexive pronoun" (15). Clark argues that

the phrase “*je pense, donc je suis*” can therefore “perhaps be expanded to something like ‘I observe myself thinking, and therefore know I exist’” (15). And though Clark notes that Descartes doesn’t use the French self-reflexive *moi-même* in the actual cogito formulation, he does use it sixteen times in the first part of *Discourse on Method* alone (16).

Clark’s attention to this detail highlights that “Descartes’s project is to study within himself in order to find the self—and once he has found himself, on this foundation to construct his knowledge of God and the world” (16). Yet, it is useful in as much as it sets up what one might call a spatial-mimetic dimension to the expression of Descartes’s argument: on one hand, the imagining subject, and on the other the subject-as-object being imagined. The manner in which the subject-in-language presents this inevitably double “vision” veers towards a kind of performative, involving a thing considering and a thing being considered, in which the latter, even if not explicitly visual, carries a kind of objectival status.

Clark’s turn to Benveniste is thus helpful. (I should note here that Benveniste’s default to he/himself etc. all comes with an implied *sic*). In “Subjectivity and Language,” Benveniste begins by thinking about how language sets up the conditions for communication. Though perhaps obvious, it seems useful to point out that Benveniste states that “it is in and through language that man constitutes himself as a *subject*, because language alone establishes the concept of ‘ego’ in reality, in *its* reality which is that of being” (224). It is also important to note that the Benveniste, the linguist, asserts that “consciousness of self is only possible if it is experienced by contrast” (224).

To an early 21st-century reader, these points are rather straightforward. Setting up this performative relationship, however, reveals both the use—and useful limits—of Clark's invocation of Benveniste in his first chapter. By extension, it also allows a window into where Descartes's vision of subjectivity differs from—yet also sets up—the virtual subject. Clark states that though Benveniste's dialectical vision of subjectivity-in-language may seem not best to characterise Descartes sitting alone in a room, it still aids us in understanding. As he argues, in speaking to oneself, the dialect of I-You changes, such that “the same person is playing both roles in the sentence – author and audience, *I* and *You*, – and you has become myself” (24). As a result:

Descartes's cogito now becomes “I say to myself that I observe myself thinking, and therefore I know that my self exists....” The subjectivity of the author's *I* constructs, though the text, the subjectivity of a *myself*, so that there will be an audience that can understand what *I* is saying.... Perhaps there is only one self here, but it has become (at least) a trinity of subjects. (24)

For this reason, Clark asserts that the “reflexive self”—the term with which he labels Descartes's mode of expressing subjectivity—is the subject without an object, or at most the subject whose object is itself” (24). Clark elides the role of dependent dialectical role that God plays in Descartes's argument here, but given that God represents a kind of ultimate self—and idealized fourth part to this tripartite self—the argument is still useful. Descartes's approach thus belies a relationship between the representative or mimetic underpinnings of linguistic expression and the performative dimension of representative rhetoric. This is to say that in as much as subject-object relations are an epistemological

necessity—such that one cannot posit an “I” without invoking or implying an I-It or I-Thou relation—it is also necessary that the expression of those relations function in a representative mode.

A brief detour: at this point, it is possible that a reader may be wondering why I am insisting on such a specific emphasis on the relation between the self and the imagined thing. The answer, quite simply, is that the relationship between the subject and its projection is at the core of this dissertation. What is produced by this relationship seems crucial, particularly as the imagined object takes on an increasingly visual and “ontologically persistent” dimension with the arrival of the virtual. In fact, I would argue that the possibility of invoking a concept such as “a holographic self” is due to a shift in both the emphasis upon, and the socio-material availability of, a field for self-representation that, like all inscriptions, hovers in the tension between agency and ideological circumscription. If one were to approach Descartes’s “conversation with himself” as a process taking place in and over time, then the ongoing relationship between subject and imagined self is at least superficially similar to the relationship between the subject and virtual avatar in as much as the projection is part and parcel of a kind of legitimization of subjectivity.

In a sense, I return to where I started: that the ineluctable and always-already simultaneous inside-outside-ness of subjectivity is one of its persistent conditions, but also one affected by technology. To wit, if in orality, the epistemological position of social speech as the virtual outside produces a conception of the self that is “outside in”—that Luria’s subjects insist their conception of their selves is best ascertained by other

subjects—then it is writing, the image, and other virtual technologies that enable a synecdochic vision of the self in a space that is divorced from, as not a part of, intersubjectivity. If that, then, is one of mechanisms by which subjects form in relation to the techne of self-presentation, what then becomes necessary is an understanding of what, if any, epistemological uniqueness belongs to the field of that presentation when it is digital—and by extension, what is then left of the self when it is intimately bound up in a relation between a body and that representation: namely, the holographic self.

The Epistemology of the Digital Virtual

At the core of any discussion of the impact of networked digital technologies is a frustratingly difficult question: what does it mean to say the digital “exists”? What phenomenal and ontological qualities does a website or a digital game express or possess, and what consequences does its seeming there- and not-there-ness have for understanding both objects and subjectivity? To answer the question, I will focus on four aspects of the digital virtual: the holographic quality of digital objects; the holographic quality of digital subjects; the digital virtual as a persistent, supra-subjective space; and finally, the confluence of all these aspects that results in the digital virtual as a space of “materialized fantasy.”

The Holographic Quality of Digital Objects

The ontology of the digital object is something that is grounded in yet exceeds an understanding of the physical object. To start, I suggest a rather plain continuum: at one

end is a physical object (or subject) that has a material phenomenality and at least appears to continue to exist beyond our perception of it; on the other end is the fictional representation, or mental self-representation of said object. It appears, at first glance to be a simplistic division. But rather than a hierarchical distinction between real material thing and an imaginary copy, the distinction I mean to evoke is not about a disparity between the pure unmediated object and the conscious—and therefore textually, ideologically constructed—fictional object. Instead, it is about the disparity between the phenomenality of the material and the imagination as experienced by the subject. There is, to be deliberately plain, a difference between a car collision and the literary narrative description of a car collision. So the binary I'm setting up here is analogous to that of sign and referent, narrative and materiality. Yes, they are mutually constitutive, inasmuch as textuality is one fundamental mode of apprehending reality. It is the tension of that very mutuality between the two interrelated and overlapping fields that often defines our relationship to politics, narrative, etc. As Nusselder notes, “the virtual is not imaginary; it produces effects” (35).

Yet digital technology makes a binary of real and not real more complicated. Joohan Kim argues in “Phenomenology of Digital Being” that while digital objects “are not physical objects They can have ‘thing-like features’ that have long been regarded as unique to the nature of physical things” (90). Kim here elides the material predication of digital objects in failing to mention the silicon, electricity, data centres, and so on that sustain them. Nonetheless, digital objects do have a “certain durability which allows us to act on them over and over again” (Kim 91), but they also display what Heidegger might

say are “certain degrees of ‘thing-totality’ of a ‘sensibly perceptible object’” (Kim 91). This is to say that when Heidegger suggests that, when I am presented with a chair, “the bodily selfsameness of the perceived persists through my circling of the thing.... I have no other perception in the sense of something else perceived” (Heidegger 43); something similar could be said of the digital object. To complicate that slightly, as Kim points out, these three fields are analogous to what Heidegger would say comprise “bodily presence” (the thing that stands for itself), “empty intending” (when we talk about the object, imagine it etc.) and the “perception of a picture” (i.e. a referential or mimetic relationship) (Kim 93).

In sustaining the tension between Kim and Massumi here, one can instead argue that the fundamental characteristic of the digital object is its *apparent or phenomenal* here-and-not-here-ness, rather than its ontological dual nature. As Kim argues:

Unlike a photo image on a paper, a digital photo image on a computer screen can be completely destroyed with a single stroke on a keyboard. A digital image can instantly be deleted, without leaving any trace in the physical world, like a dream. Nevertheless, digital-beings are not merely dreams or hallucinations which are limited to individual’s own internal perception (Heidegger, 1992, pp. 30–31). Nor are they “empty intending” which is “the mode of representing something in the manner of thinking of something.” We do not merely “think” or “imagine” digital images on a computer screen but we actually “see,” “perceive,” and “interact” with them through the body”. (93)

It is true that a trace of a digital file can still exist in fragments or on operating system file tables. Kim pushes things too far here. But my purpose in invoking Kim here is less about

a strict “ontological” difference between digital and physical, than it is to point to the differing experiential structure: that the set of material, physical relations which sustains the digital object is not subject to precisely the same causal chains as the physical object. For example, one might at the same time point to the environmental cost of a cloud-based online fictional world that is sustained by huge data centres in the desert, as one *simultaneously* also emphasizes and foregrounds the disjuncture between how a set of intersubjective relations play out therein and how they might do so in a more directly embodied, “physical” manner. In fact, it is perhaps precisely this asymmetrical or discordant relation in which material processes are simultaneously obscured or effaced, but also “escaped,” that defines the digital as opposed to a more simplistic insistence on a supposedly absolute “immateriality”—or indeed, a perspective that only looks at digitality as a series of familiar material or textual processes. As such, the phenomenal qualities of the digital object in the virtual constantly evince and engender aspects of numerous fields. Because it operates as an analogous alternate field for projecting possibility, potential, and giving a (non)shape to fantastical, unconscious desires, the virtual shares something with the imagination. Similarly, inasmuch as one might describe the fictive or aesthetic in terms of spatial metaphors—i.e., “The place where we imagine Jane and Rochester sharing a future”—the digital virtual can also provide a metaphorical home to imagine the ongoing existence of things that “don’t exist,” whether multi-user virtual environments or the web as a series of interconnected texts. Finally, if part of the way in which the material impinges upon consciousness stems from its very materiality—its tactile, visual, aural etc., qualities—then the capacity of digital technology commonly to

give visual, aural or textual shape to things that rarely had those phenomenal manifestations prior to digital technology, is significant.

The “tactile” dimension of the digital, however, must be tempered by the ever-receding nature of that tactility. As Nusselder argues, in cyberspace, “interface metaphors represent data objects that do not have a phenomenal existence. They are, to speak in Kantian terms, of the noumenal dimension” (16). This is to say that given the temporal and spatial multiplicity of the digital object—the fact that a website can exist (appear and function) upon screens across the world simultaneously—there is no *necessary* Platonism of the object, since “the encoded object loses its true form in representation. For what is supposed to be the right form for a ‘package’ of zeros and ones?” (Nusselder 48). Certainly one could trace a “material history” of a website in a linear chain of the spread and movement ones and zeroes and electrical charges, but arguably one could produce a counter-history of its social-ideological movement that may run “in opposition” to its material one.

The question of a “real” virtual object thus more explicitly becomes a question of hermeneutic frames. At the operational level, the virtual object is a collection of ones and zeros. To the user, it necessarily is through an interface of some kind that the object is rendered within a particular, and potentially fleeting, symbolic order. As a result, Nusselder suggests that this is a slightly new way to approach a referential notion of representation. If “the Kantian revolution questions it because of the constitutive quality of the subject,” then the digital revolution does so “mainly because of the assembled quality of the (digital) object” (49). Generally speaking, metaphor is common in an

understanding of the digital object, in that digital structures are constantly compared to physical ones; consider the way Twitter is talked about as a “town square,” or that the comment thread under an article is “a *place* in which discussion occurs.” As such, it is always withdrawing into other possible sets of relations not exhausted by particular spatio-temporal representations. Whether avatars, ongoing public texts of self-revelation such as Twitter and Facebook, or the “totalities” referred to as web sites, the capacity of the digital virtual as a field to suspend persistent public representations means that these phenomena can take on an objectival, semi-material quality. This is to say that with the turn to the object, if almost all things can function discursively *as* objects, then the digital virtual can often allow things that are not material *per se* to function discursively as if they were material because of their visual, semi-tactile, and persistent quality.

To say that there is a holographic quality to digitality thus describes the capacity of a digital object to operate discursively and experientially in a manner akin to a material object as it also can obscure its “actual” material predication. This subtle distinction, I argue, separates the avatar from the imagination of oneself—namely, that the networks of its material predication can be obscured as it simultaneously produces a “new” set of material relations of its own in its presentation on a screen. Important to keep in mind, however, is that the capacity to function as material is always subject to a receding or slippage. If the digital object is present to the subject at a particular spatio-temporal actualization, then the “same object” can also be simultaneously present at another instantiation. It is the capacity to be “here” that defines the digital object as *object*; it is its capacity simultaneously to be “not-here” that defines the same object as *digital* object.

The term holographic rests on the in-betweenness of pre-existing categories such that a single instantiation of the digital object can function discursively as material, as simultaneously the always-already spatio-temporally multiple digital object remains as both trace and potential.

The Holographic Quality of Digital Subjects

Engaging the phenomenality of digitality as “holographic” is a useful encapsulation of how it is phenomenally situated between the discursive fields of materiality and fictionality/the imagination. If that is the case, however, then necessarily subjectivity as it is both embodied and represented online will also need to be considered.

By “digital subjects,” what I refer to specifically are in fact “digital synecdoches” of subjectivity—representations of some aspect of subjectivity that can neither be said to stand for “the entirety of a subject” (whatever that might mean), nor simply be a neatly fractional part that unproblematically “captures something of who I am.” Instead, my use of digital subjects signifies constructed textual-imagistic personae that operate in relations of exchange online in a manner that “stands for and “speaks for” the subject (I again refer to Spivak’s invocation of Marx’s difference between *Vertretung* and *Darstellung* in “Can the Subaltern Speak”¹³). In producing those projections, one is always in the terms of an “incomplete virtual wholeness” that exists between a bodily self and an avatar (and multiple other sites) in which “the playful image of ourselves, which we can find so easily in the avatars on the internet, are still ‘avatars’ of an invisible, transcendental Self” (Nusselder 63). If the mirror stage offers a misrecognition of virtual

wholeness, then the digital-as-mirror offers a similarly false meta-virtual wholeness. At the same time, however, the potential inversion of hierarchies of not just body and representation—as in the scattered, multiplied self of the film, *Oblivion*—but also the primacy of the relation of self and the imaginary, may also demand that the concept of a holographic subject rejects the notion of mirrors at all, in favour of an ostensibly more generative or rhizomatic set of relations.

The notion of the “synecdoche of the subject” is useful because it is the sustained spatio-temporal simultaneity of a bodily subject and an avatar that gives the holographic nature of the digital its unique effect on subjectivity. Emily Apter, in “Technics of the Subject: The Avatar Drive” puts it this way:

Despite this conformism, avatars move beyond the commercialized beauty ideal towards an aesthetics of virtual surface and augmented bodies: skin, jewels, and tattoos, extreme morphology, intersectional race and gender, cross-speciation.

Avatars in this way reinforce the utopian conviction that, in the words of the

Mattes partners, “the most radical action you can do is to subvert yourself.” (6)

Just as importantly, “avatars tender the hope of a surrogate self capable of unseating the lexicon of ‘self’ and ‘own’ underwriting possessive individualism” (Apter 7) in which the I is an object one “has,” rather a process one undertakes and to which one is subjected.

The persistent temporal dimension of digital subjects is crucial. Darren James Harkness, in his dissertation “The effect of adding a zero: the blog and identity,” suggests that the blogger is a kind of Lacanian subject who “constructs an identity through the observation of others” (Harkness 38), engaging in a consistent self-constitution through

what psychologists call the “looking-glass self,” or the evaluation of the self through the eyes of others (38). More importantly though, Harkness argues that a blogger—and, I would argue, any kind of online persona—is a subject constantly looking into a sort of Lacanian mirror:

She returns every time she starts a new blog entry. [However], the blogger’s mirror stage does not resolve in the same way as Lacan’s infant; she forever flickers between the social and ideal I, constructing and deconstructing her online identity... This blog is a posthuman hybrid of text and thought, which is simultaneously present and absent because it transgresses the boundaries between physical and information. (Harkness 39)

In a manner similar to the liminal quality of a digital object, a digital subject occupies a multiple spatio-temporal position in which the idea of self and its image in the mirror is further complicated by another node in the network of self-constitution. Dimensions of subjectivity can also take on a holographic quality, exemplified, for instance, in the mutually constitutive dialectical relationship between a body and an avatar, or the text of a social network profile and the “interiority” of subjectivity. It also seems important to note that if the dialectic between self and mirror is complicated by the entrance of another field of self-recognition, then perhaps it is no longer a dialectic in the same way—or, if I take the term to invoke an ethos of teleology or linear causality, then perhaps not a dialectic at all.

Temporarily divorced from specific definitions of a holographic self, I deploy the term “holographic” to mean the capacity of digital representations to function

discursively as material objects. As such, the visual, material quality of online self-representation offers a space in which to see the self “as it truly is not,” so to speak. If, as Nusselder states, “put in a Kantian-Lacanian way, media are thus necessary instruments to synthesize the multiple stimuli of the senses” (90), then the digital-virtual offers a different sort of space for that synthesis, materializing and making public the sort of self-constitution we usually associate with diary practice or self-portraiture. Avatars especially come into play here, as they “may give a unified form to tendencies otherwise experienced as discordant and disturbing” (Nusselder 91). Again, rather than the unconscious being “a thing inside,” it is through the manifestation of unconscious intentions that one comes to recognize them: “by picking an avatar, I can formalize certain tendencies (for example, eroticism, aggression, animality) that otherwise remain dark and obscure” (Nusselder 91), even though, obviously, the “why?” of these tendencies will remain obscure to the subject. In the virtual space between that digital avatar and bodily subject is where, so to speak, we find “the subject” *and* its often-opaque, unconscious, libidinal semiotics.

More importantly to this project, this lure of fascination also delineates the functioning of the avatar: the computer stands in as the stitching process, synthesizing “the diverse sense stimuli of the user’s body into a coherent self-image” (Nusselder 89). This self-image, far from being given or transparent, contains numerous semiotic layers, first within the digital-virtual world in which it “exists,” but also in the symbolic universe of the user. As a result, Nusselder argues that “both online forms of self-representation

(‘personae’) and (anterior) ‘forms’ of the self in Lacanian theory ... can be considered avatars” (Nusselder 91).

The relation between self and self-projection is not hierarchical. When the subject imagines itself in the future or in an alternate context, it is difficult to extricate “which of the two” ends in that binary “imagines the self into being.” The limit of our binary, spatial metaphorical construction of the process is that it is difficult to express the functioning of that constantly ongoing back and forth between a consciousness and an image produced by that consciousness that, in the act of imagining, is discursively constructed as somehow “outside the mind,” yet is tautologically of it, too. At the same time, the scattering or dispersion of both the self and selfhood—the location of various dimensions of the self across numerous sites of subjectivity and fields of recognition—also suggests that Nusselder’s emphasis upon the Lacanian dimensions of this process may also require a counterbalance less explicitly predicated upon the self as a lack waiting to be filled.

Clearly, though, both systems require a binary between a thing and its representations but, furthermore, also rely on access to the thing itself. As Gunkel invoking Kant reminds us, this real thing in itself is “forever restricted and beyond us” (132). It is not that the real thing does not exist, obviously; simply that the “real thing, whatever it really is, cannot be made to appear before us in phenomenal reality” (Gunkel 132). But even this complication is unsatisfactory. Žižek argues that “the Real is simultaneously the Thing to which direct access is not possible and the obstacle that prevents this direct access; the Thing that eludes our grasp and the distorting screen that makes us miss the Thing” (168). As Gunkel puts it, the illusion is not the false

representation or a false real object, but “the illusion that there is some suprasensible noumenal Entity” (135) that offers an objective, untainted plain “above,” “beyond” or “underneath” the phenomenal. Instead, understanding “the real object” through a “conceptualization of the real that realizes the real object is itself something which is open to considerate variability, ideological pressures and some messy theoretical negotiations” (Gunkel 139) reconfigures the notion of the object as always-already bound up in spatio-temporal discursive relations.

This is all to say that the digital subject—whether visual avatar, the aggregated collection of a social networking profile, or the carefully curated personal web site—is not a singular representation. It is either born of a relational process of subject-constitution in which the online avatar stands as a publicly visible representation of the self, “for” both the self and other subjects, and as such forms a loosely binary amalgam of body and representation; or, from a different analytic lens, it is a series of nodes in a rhizomatic matrix of subject-constitution within which all nodes are representational possibilities, and all nodes are equally unfixed and subject to flux. I say “representational” here because these projections are often non-bodily or even counter-bodily (i.e. the avatar of a different race, sex etc. than the body), but they are also bound up within a system of signification and representation. I emphasize this combination not to do something as silly as denying power, but rather to elucidate the process of fantasy and identification.

This relationship between various forms of self-representation for the self, by the self, constitutes the digital subject as holographic; i.e., discursively functioning as one of the nodes in the aforementioned relations that includes both material and “non-material”

manifestations—by which I mean, textual-imagistic constructions. And again, the key (and admittedly small) difference of the holographic is that there are subjective, material, and affective effects of these projections taking on a visual, textual, aural quality in the digital virtual such that, in their capacity to operate in “real relations of exchange,” sociality online, they stand in for social exchange with material effects.

The Digital Virtual as a Persistent, Supra-subjective Space.

What is unique, interesting, and significant to literary studies about digital objects and avatars is their holographic quality—their capacity to function discursively as “actual objects,” a quality that fosters and grounds the relational structure of a holographic self. But what is necessary, then, is to understand digitality as an epistemological or discursive field “within” which these projections “exist.” The digital virtual is a place for both embodiment and becoming disembodied or “textualized.” So when we talk about the “space of cyberspace,” to what are we referring?

To Nusselder, cyberspace is the term given to “the mental realm of the human computer interface that turns us into cyborgs” (4). He says this in part because cyborgs “depend on machines for their online life” (Nusselder 4), but what is also implied is that the concept of a cyborg—which “more generally describes the dependence of human beings on technology” (Nusselder 4)—extends to a relationship between a bodily subject and a virtual space of fantasy. As a result, his notion of cyberspace is “the mental space of the conceptualization or representation of codified objects (data objects) of the computer” (Nusselder 4). This mental space is thus also one of desire, and Nusselder is

helpful here in his use of Marcus Doel and David Clarke, who suggest there are four conceptions of the virtual. The first is simulation, which relies on representation and, echoing Plato, sees the virtual image as nothing more than a pale imitation of the real. In the second, suppletion, “it is the real that is impartial, lacking and imperfect” (Nusselder 37), and the virtual functions as a perfect model for an imperfect world. The third is seduction, “in which the (fetishized) ideal of the virtual world amounts to living in the (tele)presence of a full realization of the world's possibilities” (Nusselder 37). This is to say that it posits the virtual as the idealized real for which one should abandon the real for. The difference between suppletion and seduction is that the former is a sort of inverse Platonism, while the latter is a form of neurosis. The fourth is simulacrum. It roughly falls in line with Deleuze's notion of the virtual, and does not confuse “the virtual with the possible made in the discourses of hyperrealization (the first two versions) and extermination (the third)” (Nusselder 37). Essentially, it looks at the expression of new events as a product of the interplay of various heterogeneous forces composing the virtual (Nusselder 37).

As Ananda Mitra argues in “Using Blogs to Create Cybernetic Space,” “the internet is not a space in the traditional sense” (458). Rather, it “can only be experienced discursively where its composition is the product of the way in which numerous texts are interlinked” (Mitra 458). Paying close attention to the web not as a thing, but a set of discourses, Mitra argues that the specificity of the spatial “is obtained when we remind ourselves that the internet is composed of discourses, and that interconnected discourses can produce a ‘sense’ of place that has no characteristics of traditional tangible places”

(458). It also seems worth mentioning that there are always two fields at work: the discursive space of the “the web” in the construction of an interlinked networks of fields of socio-ideological change; and the screen as the specific instance of the interaction with the digital. Very loosely speaking, this is something of a *langue-parole* division.

Here, the notion of the holographic is complicated, since the phenomenality of the digital is often at odds with its “ontology,” or, rather, what we might call its inherent qualities. But I’d argue that the distinction is one that remains “ontological,” and that the concern for my project is in how the web functions as a discursive construct. What I think is key is thus the capacity of the digital virtual to appear as and discursively function as a supra-subjective field. By “field” I mean a plane of perceptibility discursively positioned as existing as an independent space within which relations of exchange—semiotic, social, economic, libidinal—occur. I argue that this sense is similar to how we think of broad natural categories. One could speak of the “the ocean” or “the atmosphere” as “places within which things happen.” They are not distinct or inseparable from other fields, nor are they singular and in their totality easily grasped. One might say, both in their magnitude and their common cultural construction as pre-given dimensions of life on earth, that they evoke the Kantian notion of what instigates sublimity. They “exist” as planes of possibility within which objects, subjects and systems occur, and that existence is not simply given, is also discursive and ideological.

It is this production of a supra-subjective plane that houses or is home to systems of interrelation between subjects and objects that I argue gives the digital virtual a similar

sense of pre-givenness and an ongoing supra-subjective nature that renders it as a field.

Joochan Kim, invoking Edmund Husserl, puts it this way:

Assume that you are “sitting” in a virtual lecture hall on a Web site, just as [sic]¹⁴ Husserl was in his study. Digital-beings like the chairs, windows, books, and the voice of the Web master’s welcoming message already exist in advance and are “already there,” even though my attention was not yet directed toward them. And the entire Web page, which “now has entered my field of perception with all its objects which perception has thrown into relief, was already there for me,” together with the other linked Web sites which are not in view; the Web site was “already there” with its familiar Web components, “imbued with the sense” of “a lecture hall on the Web site,” the latter being on my familiar computer, my computer linked to the Web server, the Web server on the Internet, and so on. In this sense, we may say that digital-beings can be considered as a part of the “existent world” or “the universal passive pre-givenness” which exists before any theoretical interests or thematic comprehension. (92)

Kim pushes the point too far at the end. The structure of a web page or virtual game-space, just like any form, exists in a mutually constitutive relationship with content, and is not ideologically neutral. But the notion of the ongoing, supra-individual notion of the web seems especially useful because, particularly since it is ideological, political, etc., it forms an additional field of production for discourse, social exchange.

What were once discussed as metaphors and metonyms now take on a quasi-material quality. The field becomes holographic, and is presented as material, but not,

hovering in a space in which the material predication of objects in the field is effaced as they also present “as material”. “Public space,” “the court of public opinion,” “the media” are also positioned as spaces within which things happen, even though they, like the aforementioned natural fields, are not so much things as fields composed of numerous interdependent systems. The digital virtual provides a discursive-material ground for these spaces, such that what was once a metaphor becomes, if you will, “slightly less metaphorical.” What is significant about the production of this kind of field or space as persistent, ongoing and networked is that it also becomes a space for the projection of subjects. If, as Harkness notes, that “the blog can be seen as an additional method of extending our consciousness [such that] the blog is an extension of the physical body into the electronic” (44), then the electronic must be a field capable of housing these extensions necessarily. In order for that space and any objects in it to be rendered legible (and here I conceive of the Web as a quasi-aesthetic field subject to signification), it has to exist as ideologically referential, such that it is composed of interlinked texts that can speak to each other in a variety of codes, be they digital or more traditionally “linguistic.” In the production of digitality as a framework for commonly accepted notions of liberal-humanist individualism, commerce, textuality etc., we get the web as a thing that “made sense” in people’s lives.

Perhaps most important is that the persistent, supra-subjective nature of the digital virtual as an internally interdependent network means that it is a field within which digital objects and subjects can interact with one another independent of bodily subjects (although obviously, not in the absolute sense). Ultimately, this is the crux of the

holographic: in functioning as a quasi-material, discursive space, it enters into relations of exchange—semantic, ideological, material—in an ongoing, global discursive and rhetorical economy.

The Fantasy of the Digital Virtual

The confluence of these three aspects of the digital virtual—the holographic object, the holographic digital synecdoche, and digitality as a persistent supra-subjective phenomenal field—lend themselves to a crucial, though not exhaustive, notion: fantasy. This is to say that if aesthetics has always been dominated by a spatial metaphor in which it is “a place in which things occur,” then the digital is analogously a space for the individual imagination to “make fiction of itself” and to have fiction made of it, too. Thus, the digital virtual is very often a psychological space, in no small part because, as I have argued, the virtual itself is a primary mode of being human. The overarching impact of these two arguments, however, is that digital technology can be an interface for manifestations of desire, and the subject exists in reaction to the material effects of those representations of desire that exist in and through fantasy.

That spatial metaphor between subject and projection is constitutive of subjectivity in general, and that more generally, “imagination is constitutive of (technological) reality itself,” because “imagination is a medium through which even we ourselves always exist as virtual doubles” (Nusselder 84). The correlation between digital virtuality and the imagination is that “computers objectify into a material form the representations, metaphors, or symbolizations that have always mediated human

perceptions” (Nusselder 52). Moreover, “since the phantasmatic capacity of the mind functions as a medium that takes us to a place other than where we actually (think we) are, telepresence—the sense of transportation to any space created by media—belongs to the human condition itself” (Nusselder 88).

To extend the idea into psychoanalytic terms, a “constitutive relationship [exists] between the organism and its double for the first time in [Lacan’s] famous theory of the mirror stage” (Nusselder 84). Just as importantly, Nusselder argues that the theory’s “pivotal notion concerns the identification with the specular image as furnishing the self with a *virtual* unity” (84, my emphasis). The argument is predicated upon the following notion: “The mirror stage is the paradigmatic structure of the imaginary. All identifications with ‘images’ establish a sense of unity, mastery, or autonomy that is not there ‘in the real’. As constitutive elements of our personal identity, these ‘illusions’ permeate our reality with virtual images. In the mirror image (reflection), we recognize ourselves in a complete form” (Nusselder 84).

If Descartes operates through a kind of proto-virtual functioning that, nonetheless, rests on a rationally transparent subject, then embodiment works differently in a Lacanian understanding, in large part because of the imaginary. The imaginary, argues Nusselder, “as a never fully erasable—for also constitutive—identification with phantasmatic images, is in fact the libidinal motivation in symbolic (self-) expression” (69). If subject-constitution is the concern, then concerning the virtual sphere, it is not simply a question of either a mimetic, referential representation or a merely fantastical one, but instead what Nusselder calls a “libidinal body” in which the virtual projection is

not so much representation as interface. An enabling semiotic figure within a system of meaning allows entrance into symbolic play as a result of both “external” referential, discursive structures and “internal” libidinal desire.

The structure of the object of desire being a constitutive element predates the digital: “fantasy, as that which is necessary for ‘time-space distantiation’ opens up the ‘objective’ space of the world we live in, but simultaneously introduces a subjective (bodily) aspect to it. Therefore there is no objective space of self-representation: we project images of ourselves in it, as we cannot disown our own (bodily) ego” (Nusselder 86). Yet, another difference of cyberspace is in the degree of movement afforded the individual in this process of self-identification with the (digital) specular image. If “one cannot purge human communication of the ‘imagining’ of the object of desire” (Nusselder 74), then in the digital virtual “the individual is less bound to a symbolic order, leaving more space for fantasy” (Nusselder 74). Of course, this assertion of “less bound” has generated an enormous amount of controversy, as I have outlined in the above debate between referential and fantastical approaches to the virtual. Nusselder notes, however, that “it is the way I ‘imagine’ myself at the interface (as a man, a woman, an animal) that determines the nature of the exchange of signs and my being (my sense of presence) in the virtual world” (75). Fantasy or the imaginary is not a layer of interpretation or corruption of an otherwise ‘pure’ subjective experience, but is instead constitutive of the subject’s place within a similarly constitutive symbolic order.

Moreover, “this objective space of (self-representation) cannot do without the libidinal, narcissistic investment in images” (Nusselder 86). That investment in which the

subject produces an object of itself is thus always overdetermined by desire. At this point, I think, the notion of the avatar becomes especially helpful. It is here we find the crux of why the production of the subject as a visual object is so useful. First, “the spatial differentiation between the body as organism and the body as image constitutes the ego as a necessary alienation from the direct sensory relations” (Nusselder 93), such that this dialectic between the body and “its” image is fundamental to subject-constitution. This pairing, Nusselder argues, is reliant on an embodied relationship with the virtual. Rather than a sphere where the mind leaves the body, the digital virtual is a canvas for the projection—and thus partial manifestation—of an always already virtualized self:

From a Lacanian perspective, there is both the virtual subject and the real, as its inassimilable remainder or kernel. Fantasy interfaces those two orders, in its most profound functioning in an original manner. So there are not two original dimensions (the real and the virtual, ‘nature’ and ‘culture’) that must be connected afterward; rather, the fantasy interface is original and constitutive.... Our human (fantasmatic) self-image constitutes as human and not as a horse—to use one of Lacan’s examples. It is this original interface that allows us to speak of two different dimensions: the virtual [as] what fictionalizes human reality, and the real as what threatens to disturb our reality. (Nusselder 105)

The image of the mirror is an aesthetic “whole” that is, from the interior perspective of a subject, as impossible to experience as it is constitutive. But in as much as the self is ever a whole, it is so in the virtual space of the imagination. This fundamental contradiction is important to this project because, “in presenting the ‘outside’ of ourselves, we make (up)

our identity and become conscious of ourselves” (Nusselder 85). This structure of desire will become important for how it manifests in *Londonstani* and *Transmission*—and also how it is reconfigured in novel ways in *Open City*.

An Interface for the Supra-subjective?

Thus what I have arrived at thus far is a picture of the digital virtual with the following qualities: 1) it is a persistent discursive and phenomenal field in which digital objects enter into relations of exchange; 2) it is supra-subjective in the sense that the field, though sustained by electricity, human activity etc., not only persists, but operates in the absence of the physically immanent subject; 3) that the aforementioned digital objects, including those which are synecdochic representations of a subject, are “holographic” i.e. they have “reality effects” despite the fact that their appearance on digital screens (electrons forming visual representations of the electrons in code) is material in its visual nature, but not material in terms of a three-dimensional entry into immanent space; 4) that furthermore, these digital synecdoches enter into relations of exchange (semiotic, ideological, of power etc.) in the absence of their “author,” such that social networking, web sites constitute extensions of subjectivity into electronic space; 5) and finally that the production of a persistent phenomenal field rooted in and sustained by malleable digital code, and which also acts as a quasi-mimetic canvas widely accessible by broad swaths of people with concomitant socio-material privilege means that the digital virtual is also primarily a psychological space. In this psychological space, fantasy plays a key role in self-presentation and also the relationship between self-presentations

and bodily subjects in that fantasy forms the interface—i.e. the mechanism of apprehension—between subject and digital space. This is the one part of the framework through which I will be invoking the digital virtual in my analysis of the literary texts in this project—but one that requires an addition to arrive at a more complete and theoretically sound notion of the holographic self.

Interface Effects, Not Just Interface Fantasy

Over the course of the research for this introduction, it became clear to me that Nusselder's view of the digital virtual as an "interface (for) fantasy" is vital, and elucidates a great deal, particularly as an analytic lens for thinking through the two contemporary texts in chapters one and two, *Londonstani* and *Transmission*. However, in the way that happens with projects that span over a course of years, the introduction of new material and thinking forced reconsideration. In particular, Alexander Galloway's *The Interface Effect*, which was released in 2012 (some years after I first began on the trajectory of Descartes, Ong, and Nusselder), provided something of a counterpoint to Nusselder, and also forced the realization that a psychoanalytic approach might only provide one perspective, but would perhaps also not be the best fit for my reading of Teju Cole's *Open City*, or provide a complete balanced view of the problematic of the holographic self as an amalgam of bodily and digital selves. After all, even from my own set-up thus far, it is impossible to ignore that there is a tension here between, on one hand, the digital virtual as a field that offers a fascinating, fruitful arena for (Lacanian) psychical models of fantasy in which the avatar forms a quasi-material representation of the ego-ideal; and, on the

other, the Deleuzian concept of the virtual that I have invoked, something that not only sets up the usual contrast between, for example, desire and desiring-production, but a view of virtuality that contrasts a binary relation of self to a field of self-presentation with a rhizomatic or swarm-like configuration that could arguably demand a reconfiguration of the hierarchy of selfhood that places the bodily—and the related concerns—at the centre of contemporary notions of subjectivity.

To articulate fully a counterbalancing Deleuzian notion of self at this point, however, would not only stretch the reader's patience, but also the limits of a coherent project. At the same time, because the final chapter shifts its emphasis from the holographic self as mode of subjective fantasy to one of subjective multiplicity in flux between various spatio-temporal instantiations, a brief detour into Alexander Galloway's *The Interface Effect* may yield some useful results. To wit, the end of Kunzru's *Transmission* is the realization of a subjective fantasy, but both the coda of that text and, subsequently, *Pattern Recognition* and *Open City*, express and invoke a model of self, the novelty and interest of which is more fruitfully understood by way of different lens supplemental to my already loosely Lacanian one.

In *The Interface Effect*, Galloway's focus is upon the digital as mediating substance. I use the term "substance" not to give the interface an ontological quality, but to connote Galloway's emphasis upon a kind of independence of the interface, and an ongoing one, too. Rather than thinking of the interface as only a set of aesthetic or interactive practices that constitute information in particular ways, in this text Galloway examines how the interface as a synecdoche of digitality not only carries and expresses a history, but a logic

as well, and one that is perhaps specific to the economic-ideological predication of digitality as a socio-historical phenomenon. As Galloway titles a section early in the book, “If the Cinema is an Ontology, the Computer is an Ethic” (*Interface* 10). In that sense, the computer can be said to be less involved in representation or mimesis *per se*, than in the organization of objects. Computers break with “painting, photography cinema,” which, Galloway suggests, “fixate upon the embodied human form ... and its proximal relation to the world” (*Interface* 12), a point which re-iterates Otto’s emphasis upon the Romantic creation of virtual reality. Instead of the face or the personality, “profiles, not personas, drive the computer ... and it is why the object of the computer is not a man: because its data is one” (Galloway *Interface* 12). The scattering or dispersal of self is not just a question of representations, the shift going from a hierarchical binary to a flattened plurality, but one of a flattening into data, into subsets of information, partitioned and rationed out as needed. It is an informatics of subjectivity—which is also likely the precondition for the manner in which Haraway’s prescient phrase, the informatics of domination,¹⁵ has come to be ever more true. This informatics represents a flattening of a hierarchical and undulating topography of self which previously relied upon the peaks of the body and the interior experience of subjectivity as their anchors. As such, Galloway argues that “to be ‘informatically’ present to the world ... one must be a sadist” (*Interface* 13), as one must be willing to submit to the authority structure that “re-renders” one as sets of data with related sets of rewards and consequences. Think, for example, of the common social and professional punishments for not having certain social media

accounts or an “online presence,” each of which is an extension of related techno-capitalist phenomena like credit records or criminal or mental health histories.

The interface thus cannot be thought of as an object—not a screen through which one sees a mediated reality—but rather a *mediating process*. As Galloway puts it, “the computer instantiates a practice not a presence,” (*Interface* 22) and as such “the computer is not an object, or a creator of objects, it is a process or active threshold mediating between two states” (*Interface* 23). Instead of only being a window-like screen—or indeed, a screen at all—Galloway argues that the interface is also a series of non-optical objects: the mouse and keyboard, the VR headset, but also the database and its logic (*Interface* 64)—such that the interface as an analytic concept as well as a historical phenomenon “is above all an allegorical device that will help us gain some perspective on the culture in the age of information” (*Interface* 54). As such, Galloway ends up suggesting the following:

(1) software and ideology are related in a fundamental way; (2) yet it is a relationship of figuration in which the complexities and contradictions of ideology, which itself contains both utopian and repressive instincts, are modeled and simulated out of the formal structure of software itself; (3) further, software is functional and thereby exacerbates and ridicules the tension within itself between the narrative and machinic layers. (*Interface* 76)

Galloway’s third point refers to the tension between orders or registers of code and the semiotic experience of seeing that code “transcoded” into visual or linguistic signs. More

importantly, however, this argument that builds on the idea that “software is rooted in symbolic logic and not optical vision” (*Interface* 63) connotes that the computer and the interface are not just *an* ethic in general, but also ways of manifesting the broader logic of ideology as an interface between subject and world—and that further, the manifestation of that logic is not always clear, but also one that often obscures or effaces itself.

This is admittedly a belated addition to an existing theoretical framework. And it would not be quite accurate to say, therefore, that Galloway’s specific analysis of digitality here represents a Deleuzian counterpoint to Nusselder’s Lacanian philosophy. In fact, Galloway explicitly invokes his analytic framework as a kind of allegorical reworking of Marx and Freud (*Interface* 27)—although it should be noted that the text does dip back and forth into Deleuze with some regularity. What Galloway’s argument in *The Interface Effect* does suggest, however, is that interface fantasy can have interface effects: that the two concepts may not be coterminous, but instead, might represent two diverging paths of for a holographic self as analytic lens beyond only a quasi-teleological trajectory toward the ego-ideal as enabled by the virtual self-representation. Instead, it suggests that the interface is a mode of not simply “expressing ideology,” but also one engaging in a complex rendering of ideology through machinic process and ideological representation—with the tension between expression and repression contained therein. Furthermore, such a mode allows one to think of digitality in its historical moment: as a series of ideological effects that, for my purposes, can render the concept of the self in particular ways and in a particular logic, while that logic is often obscured by the seemingly “transparent” nature of interfaces themselves. Additionally—and

importantly—rather than thinking of the interface as a mechanism for manifesting a pre-existing psychic structure in a new form, the generative capacities of the interface may in fact manifest the self in differing forms, subjecting to a variety of logics, be that post-Fordist capitalism, the rhizome, the multiple dispersal of the self, or indeed, the intertwined effect of all three.

That logic of self, however, is something I have already gestured to in part. When I discuss the holographic nature of a digital object, implied are at least two things: first, a flattening of the hierarchical relations between a “real” object and its representative, digital, or database corollary; and, second, a “relation-first” configuration of both the object and subject that foregrounds multiplicity, a phenomenon which itself can be used to potentially liberating or oppressive ends. In extending such multiplicity to the self, what emerges as most important is the dispersal or scattering of the subject, such the location of subjectivity is complicated by a spatio-temporal multiplication of selves and self-representations, such that the self might be thought of as a subtraction (rather than an addition of the digital avatar as in Nusselder). Further, this relation between selves is one of “mediated self-relation”—i.e. an interface for self-relation—such that the function of the mediating substance between subjectivity and subjective self-representation is usefully understood as working in at least two ways: mediating unconscious, pre-conscious forces for the ego as a way of manifesting and channelling desire; and also, of mediating the dispersal of self implied by an informatics of subjectivity in which the self in relation to its various representations is a flattened constellational arrangement in which the subject is “object-ified” and rendered as a matrix of data points by both

economic and material structures, but also becomes “data to itself” through an object-ive logic. The final point, I believe, is crucial to an understanding of *Open City* as a text of the holographic self. However, this then demands an augmentation of my articulation of my understanding of the digital.

The Holographic Self

The concept of a holographic self must expand conceptually from my initial emphasis. Rather than a specific concept of self that invokes a particular analytic approach, the holographic self is a term meant to connote the self in relation to digitality. The term arises from the historical moment of the early twenty-first century and posits that selfhood in relation to digitality is, in effect, subjectivity as understood as a relation between a subject and a digitally-mediated externality in which self-representations form constitutive elements of the self. However, rather than self-representations only being expressions of fantasy which function as aspirational, affective, or strategic deployments of self, the scattering or dispersal of self—the nodes within a matrix of subjectivity—may also carry at least two other dimensions: firstly, they represent a flattened non-hierarchical arrangement in which the self is the in-flux process of the movement between these nodes; and secondly, these nodes of self-representation are also just as likely to be “externally” shaped such that their circulation in relations of exchange is often subject to not only surveillance, but also to the kind of sousveillance that results in the “voluntary” expression of self in the terms of the informatics of domination. Another, more simple way to express this idea, is that in my “Nusselderian” expression, the

holographic self *allows* the subject to do certain things; and in the countervailing approach, the holographic self is *subject* to what the interrelation of digitality and capitalist-democracy *allows*. It is not a strict, inherent difference in modes, but two differing analytic lenses through which understanding the literary representation of the subject in a post-digital era becomes more clear. As such, the holographic self is an analytic concept meant to provide a lens for analysing critically cultural representations of self in which: a) the self in relation to digital synecdoches of self is considered primary, and; b) the self will always express the classic ongoing tension between structures of oppression and normative control versus mechanisms of agency and agential reconfiguration of repressive social norms. The holographic self is thus a figure—with all the imperfection and wiggle room such a term implies—for both subjectivity in the digital era and a post-digital self: a subject caught in the paradoxical situation of being presented with a field of action rife with real potential for agency, as it also concentrates and exacerbates the desubjectivation of capitalist and related forces.

The Electronic, Flickering Beneath Fibres of Pulp

The preceding is admittedly a significant chunk of theoretical set-up for a literary project. However, given the relative novelty of digitality, and that my argument is often built upon oblique or implied references to the logic or ethos of the digital virtual rather than explicit discussion of technology, it seemed necessary to connect a trajectory from Ong and Descartes, through Heidegger and Deleuze, to Nusselder and Galloway.

The question, though, is what these theorists have to do with the contemporary *Bildungsroman*. Initially, however, I must note that what began as an unconscious coincidence in the selection of contemporary texts, later came to have significance. Malkani's *Londonstani*, Kunzru's *Transmission*, and Cole's *Open City* are all works by non-white male writers situated in either London or New York—or more precisely, that Malkani lives in London, Kunzru moves back and forth between London and New York and Cole lives in New York, but was raised in Nigeria. This is to say that, almost inadvertently, this dissertation has become “about” the location of a certain kind of privileged cosmopolitan immigrant identity—and one that is intimately concerned with the notion of positionality: the location of a subject position or positions along a variety of orthogonal axes of identity in order to arrive at an intersectional configuration. Indeed, it is the very fact of “positionality” as a manifestation of numerous threads—the body as text, the history of the marked, raced body, the circular relation between representation and the raced body as a site of enunciation in relation to cultural currency—that helps define the social functioning of race.

Far from shifting the focus of the project toward an explicit concern with postcolonialism or cosmopolitanism or race theory, however, I argue that my concern with race is instead reflective of an ongoing concern of mine with the recognition of identity in relation to public projections of self, and of the often idealistic expressions of desire to “exceed” positionality, whether utopian liberal-humanist notions of a supposed neutral self, or the similarly, if inversely, utopian ideal of a mixture that would somehow “erase difference.” This is to say that although the thrust of this project is to elucidate

some of the effects of the digital virtual on the representation of the subject in coming of age narratives, those narratives are intimately concerned with the arrival of selfhood at a certain plateau of acceptance, recognition and the dis/symmetry of public and private. The plateau has become, to my mind, inextricable from questions of race, ethnicity, and subject position as a fact of the body. It is not that, therefore, I then wish to argue either that the capacity to “textualize” identity online somehow always foregrounds race, or that it has a capacity of erase or entirely obscure race. Rather, the emphasis has other effects, in that it has elicited in the project a dual, entwined concern with both narrative trajectory and the “generic” choice of the *Bildungsroman* as they relate to an implied desire to exceed a singular relationship between *a* body and *an* identity. That this particular set of texts, in its emphasis upon a subject moving both literally and figuratively through discursive and material space respectively, prominently focuses upon race produces three related effects: first, it highlights how the digital virtual helps suspend a bodily self in relation to a constellation of representations of identity that together form what I will then argue is “the virtual self” (though the three focal texts each do this in unique ways); and secondly, it is a phenomenon greatly enhanced by a comparative reading with texts from the eighteenth and nineteenth century that also feature similar concerns with trajectory, but have at their disposal, different techne of self-representation to arrive at their goal; and thirdly, in each of the focal contemporary texts, there is not only an implied desire to exceed positionality (whether or not such a thing is materially or ideologically possible), but a desire that is predicated upon the possibility of a “folding-out” or mirrored refraction of self beyond one determining site of

subjectivity (i.e. the body) and instead, finding subjectivity scattered across a spatio-temporal split between body and sites of aesthetic representation. Thus, though the focus of this dissertation is the contemporary trans-Atlantic immigrant narrative of cosmopolitanism, it gets to that argument through three other texts from the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries respectively. Doing so allows for a ground of contrast that both relies on both epistemology in general and shifting notions of subject positions. The so-called “focal” contemporary texts are Gautam Malkani’s *Londonstani*, Hari Kunzru’s *Transmission*, and Teju Cole’s *Open City*. Each is paired with a comparative partner that I think elucidates the novelty or difference of the holographic self: for Malkani it is Oscar Wilde’s *A Picture of Dorian Gray*; for Kunzru, Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*; and for Cole, William Gibson’s *Pattern Recognition*.

Thus the sustained and simultaneous concern with the nature of digitality and subjectivity on the one hand and the trajectory of the *Bildungsroman* on the other leads to my argument about these texts. There is a trend within these novels in which the self is doubled or multiplied, and the body-as-text and the representation of self-as-text operate in dialectic relation with each other as a “whole”—if always an opaque, withdrawing whole—such that in the contemporary texts in this project, it becomes impossible to consider the protagonists as bodies alone, but always bodies in relation to holographic representations of self that stand for and speak for the self in particular economies of exchange, whether to the self or to other selves. This expression of desire is one that, in all the contemporary texts, manifests as a wish to move beyond a “positioned subject”—not the liberal humanist ideal of a neutral sovereign self, but a subject that exceeds the

grid model of subject position without also abandoning race, sex and other categories as constitutive dimensions of self. This desire for the supersession of an identity that is located on axes of race, ethnicity, nationality, sex, class, and others is, I argue, linked in these texts to the notion of a holographic self: an analytic concept of selfing and selfhood that takes as its ground the scattering or dispersion of self across spatio-temporal sites of expression and thus de-prioritizes the primacy of the body as the main site of subjectivity. To be clear, I am not suggesting that these texts invoke a necessarily new or different concept of subjectivity but, rather, that they *express a desire for such* and, in the process, suggest that the digital virtual offers a fruitful space for thinking through a post-positionality self.

A short diversion, however, is necessary concerning positionality itself. The notion of the positioned subject invokes a vast body of work, particularly because the shift toward the body-as-text and the subject as positioned has occupied theory for some decades now, and is arguably only now to beginning to wane as the dominant mode of theory with the rise of the affective turn.¹⁶ But I believe one can still usefully articulate something of the notion of subject position—the thing I am arguing these texts express a desire to exceed or escape—through a brief foray into Gayatri Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. Spivak’s pivotal essay, after all, seeks to examine the position-ing of the subject that defines the idea of “subject position.” It is the co-dependent relationship between the figure of the subaltern and the discursive economy that circulates both around and through it that produces a system of “representationalism”: an ideological economy predicated upon the currency of particular terms, ideas, and figures-as-stand-ins-for-

subjects that must be both depicted “responsibly” and, in a circular relationship, spoken for due to a lack of power. For example, in her critique of Foucault and Deleuze’s “unquestioned valorization of the oppressed as subject” (255), Spivak argues that this approach is a kind “ventriloquism of the of the speaking subject” (255) such that “the concrete experience that is the guarantor of the political appeal of prisoners, soldiers, and schoolchildren is disclosed through the concrete experience of the intellectual, the one who diagnoses the episteme” (255). Hers is, as usual with Spivak, a densely wound argument, but it points to the interdependent and circular relationship between a certain vision of the speaking subject, and representation as both phenomenon and structural system. One must speak to something, and subject position is a site of the *possibility of utterance* because speaking, ultimately, is also about being heard—or as Spivak modifies, that speaking “entails a distanced decipherment by another which is, at best, an interception” (309).

The “figure” at the core of the essay—by which I actually mean Bhubaneswari Bhaduri, the middle-class Bengali girl who “cannot speak”—is so fundamental as a figure within “Theory” because Spivak’s deployment of her story marked out how the subject is both marked as a body, but also as a subject-positioned on a three-dimensional set of axes of identity in which there are cascading degrees of power which are subsequently erased by the complexities of gender, race, class, caste, sexuality and many more. Bhaduri cannot speak—or, as Spivak revised in the updated essay in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, that her middle class status meant she both could and could not speak in certain ways—because her act of suicide is both a silent act, but also that a “woman’s interception of the

claim to subalternity can be staked out across strict lines of definition by virtue of their muting by heterogeneous circumstances” (308). To wit, the overlapping dynamics of race, colonialism, gender, and class each manifest in a network of representation to not only mute certain subject positions, but also to produce a system of exchange in which the speech of certain valorized figures acts of a form of currency to mobilize, galvanize, and ultimately concretize (or is it calcify?) structures of representation and power that rely upon the replication of certain subject positions in circular and reificatory systems of speaking.

It is admittedly inadvisable to try and compress Spivak’s argument into a couple of pages in order to make a comparatively simple point: that subject positions not only are about being fixed in relations of representation, but also relate to how power functions to create structures of reception, reading (of the body), and hermeneutics. What I hope is that the general familiarity of the argument that now exists eases the compression of the ideas into a small space. Yet, I invoke Spivak’s careful examination of both subject position and a receptive context, both of which are predicated upon what I call “representationalism”—an economy or system of exchange of signifiers of identity that demands both “speaking for” and “standing for” as an inevitable effect of power and its manifestation of social and public structures—lays out how subject position is at once an articulation of domination and liberation: that it is the thing that both engenders and allows for essentialized *and* liberating approaches to identity, community, and politics.

Yet I would also argue that the desire to exceed this specific notion of subject position is thus a desire to find a mechanism—or, to use a different term, an interface—

for engaging socio-material processes of representation while not being pinned in place by the discursive and ideological “reading” of the body and its related functioning as a entry into visual relations of social exchange. The legibility of the body or representations of such insert the subject into relations of exchange in which race, gender, and other forms of identity that are involved in a mutually co-emergent constitution of identity “in accordance” with structures of power. These relations form the ground of communal politics as well as the very problem with the identity politics and the risk of the reification of power binaries predicated on dichotomous relations of identity. As such, a desire for a proxy or stand-in for subjectivity to operate in fields of social exchange in a manner that either obscures or effaces is reliant on at least two ideas: first, a “real” field of social exchange (i.e. one with material and ideological consequence) in which the body is de-prioritized, regardless of whether or not signifiers of race, gender, class and related ideas are still visible and legible; and, second, that the self-representation can operate in the absence of and in contradistinction to the functioning of the raced, gendered, identified body. Whether or not this is possible or even ultimately desirable is a separate question from what a set of texts say about the subject, subjectivity, and the holographic self when they express a desire for such supersession—and in this project, my concern is with the latter. Yet, what becomes clear is that the holographic self as concept—the self as conceived as a spatially and temporally suspended relation between body and digital self-representation(s)—is always doubly concerned with the interface: on the one hand, the hologram as interface for self-fantasy or self-as-multiples selves relation; but also as an extra-bodily interface for intersubjective relation in material networks of exchange. The

hologram is the interface, and like my preceding explication of interfaces, it can be either mechanism of self-actualization, or self-constitution in the “model of the medium’s ideology.” Secondly it is also an interface for entrance into “external” relations of exchange in the absence of the body, a phenomenon not unique to digitality itself (think of the newspaper, or public letter for example), but which is unique in the scale and scope of the availability of the public self.

As such, finally, my argument about these texts will rely on the following three ideas: firstly, that each of the focal novels deploy the holographic self as (at least) an always-doubled interface of self-relation and intersubjective relation; secondly, that this deployment expresses a desire, in differing ways, to exceed the fixity of a certain kind of positionality or subject position, whether that is about a racial identity or “Identity” itself as a concept; and finally, that in the expression of such, each of the texts put forth an argument against the singularity of identity at a single spatio-temporal location and, by extension, that the location of identity across either “actual” multiple spatio-temporal sites, or the invocation of a multiplied logic of self, demand a new mechanism of reading the self in narratives of the hologram. The holographic self is thus a model for thinking about a kind of post-digital subjectivity that engages the dispersal of subjectivity across space and time.

All of these texts initiate an implied teleological trajectory for their protagonists at the end of which, the reader is asked to assume, the main character will have “evolved,” “found a resolution,” or “arrived at his or her goal.” In all of the focal contemporary texts, this telos arrives through either the use of digital technology itself, or through the

invocation of the relation between a bodily self and a non-bodily representation, or a digital rhizomatic of self, each of which is combined with the holographic effects of the digital object. As such, this dissertation asserts that not only does digital technology reconfigure the process of subject formation in relation to self-representation, but that, more specifically, that the holographic self as a concept itself express a desire to exceed the policed identified body as it also desires to exceed the socio-ideological constraints of identity categories—while through the very same mechanisms, enabling those same ideologies by re-rendering the self as a set of relations readily co-opted by the ideologies one might seek to resist.

In chapter one, the concern is the function of the holographic dimensions of self as a tactic of obfuscation meant to supersede the policing of the body, whether in terms of racial identity, or what the texts dictate as acceptable sexual and moral behaviour. The focal novel is Gautam Malkani's *Londonstani*, which I contrast with Oscar Wilde's *A Portrait of Dorian Gray*. Each relies on a techne of self-representation in order to obfuscate certain dimensions of self so that the protagonist can not only engage in particular behaviours, but also use that mechanism as a path of self-actualization. While a virtual space is used as a conduit in both texts, the passage through which leads to a manifestation of the texts' ideologies, each has a differing relation to the possibilities afforded to the subject in relation to socio-ideological constraint, a difference that I argue is predicated upon the material-ideological availability of the hologram as a viable mechanism of social exchange. In *A Portrait of Dorian Gray*, Dorian's eventual punishment for his dalliances with an extra-Victorian morality are products of a unified

Cartesian (and print-based) dialectic between a body and an identity, a unity which the text eventually enforces. Conversely, in *Londonstani*, Jas's performative, provisional textual production of a body that resists normative racialization—until it “does its job” and is cast off—expresses a concept of subjectivity enabled by the simultaneous suspension of virtual-textual image “in front of” the physical body. As such, the texts deploys the holographic self as a mechanism of manifesting a particular sort of ego-ideal, one that at least expresses a particular sort of “post-racial” hybridized self. Additionally, both novels have their protagonists operate in relation to a virtual field rooted in what one might call the aesthetic: the image in the case of *A Picture of Dorian Gray* and language in the case of *Londonstani*. Ultimately, the differing dialectical approach of what consequences the subject must suffer for severing an assumed link between body and identity are not only products of historical difference, but also an underlying ideological assumption about the expression of dimensions of self through subjective expressions in extra-bodily space. Ultimately, whereas Dorian's use of the painting as a proxy or avatar for his moral fibre eventually fails because of the text's need to clamp down on untethered desires, both Jas's and the novel's use of textual obfuscation allows him to achieve his self-ideal, thereby setting up two differing relations to the legitimacy of virtuality as a mechanism of exceeding socio-material constraint—and it is a difference that is best understood as the difference between the more general ideal of a “virtual self” and the historically specific notion of the holographic self as an interface for a specific kind of masculine, “post-racial” fantasy.

In chapter two, I will shift away from the virtual as a conduit and toward the virtual as relational space as manifested in two forms: the imagination and the digital virtual. My concern in this section will be Hari Kunzru's *Transmission*, which I will also elucidate by comparing it to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Specifically, I wish to look at the relational structure of the protagonist and a receding virtual space as an aspirational site in actualizing the implied telos of the texts. In Brontë's novel, Jane's trajectory operates in relation to a series of virtual horizons—whether the imagination, windows, mirrors, or the horizon itself—only to arrive at a materially circumscribed resolution that actualizes an ideal end for Jane within the patriarchal frame of the text. Conversely, *Transmission* sees its protagonist function in relation to a publicly circulated projection that often supersedes the bodily identity of Arjun in which the hologram comes to stand in as the primary site of subjectivity above and against Arjun's bodily self. In this novel, as in *Londonstani*, the holographic self also enables the manifestation of an ego-ideal—which occurs through the hologram's deployment as an interface for self. Yet, at its end, *Transmission* also acts as the hinge of this project in which the holographic self itself turns, switching from an interface for a pre-existing self to self-actualize, to a self that is itself a set of potentialities yet to actualize—a thing that happens because of the impossibility of arriving at the text's telos any other way. To wit, the holographic self becomes an expression of desire not just for a phantasmatic post-racial self, but rather a self that can exceed its pinning down at a specific site of identity, or the specific idea of positionality itself. The text ends with Arjun being spoken of in absentia by narrator as “it” actualizes the telos of the text in a virtualized space. In doing so, *Transmission*

constructs the digital virtual as a site of longing, a generative space in which Arjun the character expresses the Deleuzian ideal of the Idea: the yet-to-actualize “dialectics of difference” not yet pinned down to an Identity.

In chapter three, the holographic is deployed both to tease and ultimately narrativize the holographic self not as an interface for fantasy, but as a dispersal or scattering of selfhood over multiple spatio-temporal sites of subjectivity, such that the concept of self invoked demands a multiplicity for which the digital virtual’s implied ethos is relied upon as both phenomenal and ideological ground. In such a model, the hologram is an interface both for intersubjective relations, but also for the self, and occurs in a manner that complicates the primacy of either the body or a singular notion of identity. To arrive at this idea, I will examine the questions of referentiality, taxonomy and legibility in relation to holographic self-representations in William Gibson’s *Pattern Recognition* and Teju Cole’s *Open City*. My focus is here is elucidate the complex relationship between the holographic nature of digital projections and referentiality in relation to narrative resolution in which the self as a concept that invokes a referent at all must be questioned. The useful contrast here is that *Pattern Recognition* flirts with a destabilization of taxonomy and referentiality so that the protagonist, Cayce, can solve the various mysteries of the text; however, the text ultimately clamps down on that hermeneutic instability, thus returning to a notion of self that is ultimately singular and linear. Meanwhile in Cole’s novel, Julius performs in text the self-construction of the social media user, and in doing so, produces the self as a always-multiple object which, crucially, beckons the viewing or reading subject to identify or name it in a certain way as

it obscures or hides other dimensions of self. To wit, Cole's novel produces a narrative structure parallel with the digital virtual as phenomenal experience in that it 'coerces' the reader to identify with the introspective, thoughtful Julius, only to then reveal that depiction of the subject is always an object withdrawing from view. The doubled interface of the hologram—that it is both a form of self-relation and an interface of intersubjective, social relation—is invoked to construct "Julius" as a always-receding multiplied holographic self who resists singular definitions of self. Additionally, the hermeneutic indeterminacy that *Pattern Recognition* ultimately eschews, *Open City* embraces. If the capacity to self-represent using digital media provides an additional node of self-actualization in a matrix of representations, that same process of rendering the self "illegible"—or legible or "nameable" only in certain ways—highlights the manner in which the digital virtual plays into pre-existent structures of power to reproduce privilege through forms of self-inscription and the attendant cultural currency necessary to do so. To wit, the holographic self as an analytic concept can both manifest "pre-existing" notions of self when it is deployed as interface for fantasy, but can also require an ostensibly more rhizomatic definition of self that is less a question of fantasy, of more of movement between nodes upon a matrix of selfhood.

What I hope is clear by now, however, is the underlying argument that ties these chapters together. Inasmuch as Western selfhood can often, at various points in history, operate through the production of a virtual self composed of a constellation of body and (self)representations, the digital virtual adds an additional pole into this networked set of relations in order to produce what I am calling the holographic self. This addition

however, is also a supplement, an intervention into an economy of signifiers that, on the one hand, function as an interface for intersubjective relations in a manner that complicates a simple one-to-one relationship between a subject position and a raced, gendered body; and on the other hand, the same capacity always threatens to always “replace” the bodily self, or become what I have called “epistemologically prior” such that the holographic self can, rather than being thought of as an addition or augmentation can, conversely, reconceive the self as a subtraction from a pre-existing multiplicity such that the self and its various holographic representations represents a “multiplicity-first” concept of self that is predicated upon a spatio-temporal scattering and dispersal that renders singular notions of selfhood and identity impossible to adhere to.

CHAPTER ONE: IDENTITY AND SELFIE-REPRESENTATION

R.I.P.D., the 2013 supernatural comedy film, is unlikely to go down in film history for any reason other than its mediocrity. Nonetheless, like many cultural artefacts, it remains a document of its time, most usefully and most interestingly in its use of avatars.¹⁷ The film's dubious premise is that deceased, ghostly "officers" patrol Earth to hunt down lost spirits who refuse to cross over into death, and to do so, main characters Rick and Roy return to the "land of the living," visible only as their avatars—one as an elderly Chinese man, the other as a conventionally attractive white, Russian woman.

The film does its best, and fails miserably, at playing these racialized, gendered stereotypes for laughs. Even so, carried along with the silliness is at least one perspective on the implied dichotomous tension of a virtualized identity: a relational structure between an assumed "true self" and a representation that obscures that truth. To wit, the attempt at comedy relies on the ostensible disparity between "authentic" selves and specific representations of identity that do their narrative work based on their relative expressions of cultural capital, and the attendant connections to race, language and gender. Just as intriguingly, it is the avatar that presents as "solid," while the self it obscures is spectral. As such, while *R.I.P.D.* aims for comedic effect from the inability to control one's avatar—to have a neat concordance between the interiority of subjectivity and its aesthetic representation—I invoke it here to raise more pressing questions for contemporary theorists of art and culture: What work does digital aesthetic self-representation do in the constitution of the subject? And in what way is the literary

representation of the subject inflected by the newly widespread ability to craft and shape one's "avatar," the public representation of self of the digital social media?

One might begin to answer those questions by considering the role of self-representation in the inscription of self-narrative. In the introduction to *Transient Images: Personal Media in Public Frameworks*, Eric Freedman uses the term technobiography to imply "a particular form of authorship [that] calls for an understanding of how the self is situated within social relations that inherently involve engaging with information technologies" (4). The "author" in question is thus not the writer of the novel or magazine article. Instead, it is quite simply any subject who inscribes a biography or mediates interactions with others through digital technology. If in *R.I.P.D.*, Rick and Roy had their public personas constructed for them, then in the digital virtual a self-inscriptive form of technobiography reigns, with all the tension, stricture and paradoxical "agency" implied by the idea.

As such, technobiography foregrounds the public writing-out of identity as part of modern subjectivity and identity themselves. It is thus a fitting term for how an individual orients him or herself, and is oriented in relation to, the circulation of representations-of-self in digitality. That inscription of selfhood, operating as a kind of two-way interpellation,¹⁸ forms an additional node in the processes of subject-constitution, often by having images discursively operate as a metonym for the self in the public exchange of signs. The image or the textual construction of self thus acts as an interface for a variety of processes and, as Galloway noted in *The Interface Effect*, an

interface is not simple a conduit or window, but a logic. The logic of digital self-representation and its difference from earlier, “analogue” forms is the focus of this chapter.

It is for this reason that I turn to Gautum Malkani’s *Londonstani*, a text I will also read in relation to Oscar Wilde’s *A Picture of Dorian Gray*. The purpose of reading these two novels in parallel, however, may not seem immediately apparent. Written just over a hundred years apart, their concerns seem remarkably different. While *Dorian Gray* ostensibly raises issues of art, moral corruption and aestheticism, *Londonstani* is a text far more focused upon cultural and racial identity and the *Bildungsroman* trope of self-actualization. When one approaches the texts symptomatically, however, particularly in regards to their presentation of the discursive and signifiatory circulation of the body and its image, a common thread emerges. In both texts, the protagonist obscures external markers of behaviour, character or identity as defined by the text. In doing so, however, both novels produce a layer of complication in the persistent schism between the interior and exterior of subjectivity—and ostensibly, in each case, the “complication” is the possibility of technobiography itself.

Each text introduces a “virtual” self that forms a relationship with a conception of identity more dependent upon “an interior” consciousness and the physical body. Additionally, each text does so through certain literary conceits. In *Dorian Gray*, the supernatural painting is used as a mechanism which allows Dorian to function “outside” of Victorian morality by having part of his subjectivity exist beyond the body,

therefore troubling assumed interrelation between moral action and the face as synecdoche for the soul. In *Londonstani*, however, Jas's capacity to perform a similar feat of obfuscation—namely that, for much of the text, a white male passes as *desi*¹⁹—comes through the functioning of text as a technology, but also in the novel's location of his identity in the exterior space of recognition from a community of his peers. Jas is *desi* for as long as his peers choose to recognize him as such. In a sense, then, Jas is akin to Luria's primary oral subject,²⁰ but one for whom the possibility of an exterior, non-bodily space of recognition and legibility is a material, historical possibility. The techne of self-representation invoked in *Londonstani* is thus not only textual, but also foregrounds a space of hermeneutic reception that prioritizes non-bodily signs. As such, I argue that although it is a text that seems almost specifically to avoid mention of the internet, *Londonstani* invokes the logic of a holographic self even as, in certain ways, it evades or effaces the digital, and perhaps more importantly, networked, predication of the concept.

Yet, it is precisely the desire to examine the literary technobiographic function of a (self) image that is the focus of this chapter. The specific aim, however, is the capacity of technologies such as chirography, typography, visual art and digital technologies to participate in that process of self-presentation or self-projection in which some aspect of subjectivity is also a mimetic object. The represented "projection" may be aesthetic (the visual or the textual), of the imagination (a mental space in which one imagines oneself) or an ongoing dialectic between the subject and the social, the state or other configurations of an outside (the self as interpellated by and through a sign system of possible selves). In fact, it seems fair to say that it is usually a combination of all three—

though my emphasis in this chapter will be predominantly on text and image. More specifically, I will engage what differing modes of self-representation do to the signification of a body as subject-ive object within discursive practice, questioning whether the existence of another field for the exchange of social relations upsets, disturbs or augments self-presentation in which the body or subject-as-text in these novels registers according to various hermeneutic frameworks. Of concern is how partial representations of the self through different modes of technology—be they virtual avatars, portraits or fictional-textual identities—differently enable multiple readings of a subject, particularly in how literary texts deploy these differences to assert different evaluations of a body that either does or does not read according to social and cultural norms. I do so in order to investigate if a digitally-inflected notion of subjectivity manifests in contemporary literature’s concern with an “obfuscated identity,” but further, what *Londonstani*’s invocation of a holographic self expresses in terms of a positioned identity and a desire for a kind of “post-racial” ideal of hybridity. Framed as a question: how do the differing technological and ideological investments in technobiography in these texts express contrasting possibilities for a self that evades social stricture, and does so through an effacement of the visual and the immanently bodily?

I Self-Present, Therefore I Am

Londonstani and *A Picture of Dorian Gray* each invoke analogous but still-differing relationships between their protagonists and the spatio-temporal dimensions of the

technologies through which they obscure, complicate or otherwise affect simple one-to-one readings of a body and an assumed stable, unitary identity. Yet because both texts invoke the trope of the *Bildungsroman*, the trajectories and resolutions of each become of particular import. To summarize each novel quickly: *A Picture of Dorian Gray* focuses on the supernatural effects of a portrait of the titular character created by painter Basil Howard, and the relation of each of these men to Basil's friend, Lord Henry Wotton. Dorian is described as possessing a preternatural beauty, a trait that Basil uses for inspiration to create the painting in question, and which Lord Henry uses as a way to put forth a philosophy of aesthetic and physical indulgence as a mode of living. After expressing a desire never to age, Dorian finds that the painting operates as a proxy or avatar for the moral effects of his actions, absorbing the effects of his "evil." As he passes through what the text constructs as various forms of "moral degradation"—from inciting the suicide of infatuated lover Sybill to murdering Basil himself—the painting turns uglier and uglier until, finally, when Dorian himself is killed by Sybill's brother, thus restoring a kind of moral order, the painting reverts to its original beauty while Dorian's dead body is left twisted and horrific.

Dorian Gray treats that alternative space as a virtual possibility that must eventually be closed off. *Londonstani*, however, treats it as a thing to be cast off once its usefulness has run out. In the novel, Jas is an outcast British teenage boy in a London suburb seeking acceptance amongst a group of South Asian peers who manifest a *desi*, British-Asian identity that arose in the mid- and late-nineteen nineties—particularly in their language, which is represented as not only a mixture of British and Punjabi and

Hindi slang, but also is written in the text using “textspeak,”²¹ the slang and shorthand used on first cellular phones, then smartphones, that emerged in the 2000s. The boys are engaged in the low-level criminal activity of selling stolen cellular phones in order to chase expressions of material wealth, while also pursuing romance, which for Jas means falling for a Muslim girl, a possibility complicated by inter-communal prejudice between his Hindu and Sikh friends and Samira’s Muslim family. Presented with an opportunity to work for Sanjay, an affluent, South Asian mentor, the boys do so, hoping to achieve their aspirations for material wealth, but find themselves in over their heads as Sanjay’s complex manipulation of new EU import/export rules involves real danger. At the text’s climax, where Jas is expected to break into his father’s cellular phone shop, Jas is revealed to in fact be Jason Bartholomew-Cliveden, a white British boy who had taken upon himself a *desi* identity in order to fit in—and which, once it had served its purpose, he also then discards—but is also complicated by an ending which gestures toward an unusual form of cultural hybridity.

Each text is thus intimately concerned with technologies of obfuscation, but also treats those technologies with differing moral and ideological valuations. The difference, I argue, is one that should be read symptomatically in regards to a differing ideological relationship to the place of virtuo-visual technologies. In *Dorian Gray*, the painting dislodges a one-to-one relationship between body and character and is as a result a threat to an established moral order. Quite differently, the swirl of multiple identities in *Londonstani* reveals a concern with how to “resolve” a contradictory historical situation, one in which identity is fluid but bodies are not always read as such. To wit, I argue that

Londonstani's embrace of cultural or racial fluidity is not only a result of post-structuralist ideals of fluidity or performativity, or even white privilege, but also an investment in the digital virtual as enabling the epistemological and material ground for a spatio-temporally multiple subject that also multiply identifies and signifies. Put in more simple language that I will later expand upon, *A Picture of Dorian Gray* is an expression of the threat posed by virtuo-visual technologies, while *Londonstani* expresses an embrace of it, thereby troubling essentialist reactions not only to cultural hybridity, but also the ever-present issue of reification²² that lingers around the term. It is not that the text explicitly invokes the internet as some kind of saviour technology; rather, it invokes the logic of the holographic self as an expression of desire for a hybridity that effaces the visual predication of a positioned racial identity, relying on a doubled meta-textual function of "text" itself in order to skirt around the visually-predicated linkage between the body and an identity. Thus, while *Londonstani* does not specifically invoke a thing called "the internet," it does invoke its logic at a specific historical moment in which the digital virtual is predominantly textual. This emphasis upon text—rather than the image as an analog for the body—is what forms the text's conceit about identity, obfuscation, and race. However, both texts flirt with alterity because they each express the virtual as an aspirational pole in a dialectic relationship between the present and the place- and time-to-come in which contemporary historical contradictions are virtually (and thus temporarily) escaped.

The Spectral Image of Self

A Picture of Dorian Gray opens with the image of an empty space of “the studio” being filled with the ineffable and yet sense-heavy “rich odour of roses,” “the heavy scent of lilac” and “the delicate perfume of the pink-flowering” thorn (Wilde 5). The room is filled with scents, elements indicated by textual gesture, but whose materiality themselves would require metaphoric representation. Similarly fleeting and “immaterial” are the laburnum, “whose tremulous beauty seemed hardly able to bear the burden of a beauty so flame-like as theirs” (5). Lord Henry also witnesses this “stretched in front of [the] huge window,” which itself leads him to think “of those pallid Jade-faced painters who, in an art that is necessarily immobile seek to convey swiftness and motion” (Wilde 5). At the outset of the novel, the relationship between the subject and representation is foregrounded, especially in the partiality of representation—of its always-already doomed nature to reflect, refer to, re-present. In a related vein, the introductory emphasis on the transmission of the ineffable between spaces produces a focus upon rooms as arenas of action. As Pai Brînzeu argues in “Dorian Gray’s Rooms and Cyberspace,” the careful delineation (and also *non*-description) of space in the novel, in which “every chapter is situated within a different closed space, arranged in concentric circles around the very portrait of Dorian Gray” (22), produces a spatial relation between the characters and the aesthetic object of the painting.

The text thus invokes a relationship between a thing and its virtual presence, and such doubling is highlighted because the opening also contains two foreshadowed

disappearances: the “sudden disappearance” (3) of Basil Howard, but also of the image of an unsullied Dorian, which Basil attempts to capture mentally “as though he sought to imprison in his brain some curious dream from which he might awake” (6). Here is another form of the dialectic, the referent as the body and the sign as echo or trace. Such a scene relates neatly to my earlier invocation of Descartes, as the ideal/ized projection of the subject exists in a doubled way: on one hand, the image of Dorian as perfect and unchanging in Basil’s imagination; but also the image of Dorian produced as an object in the famous painting. Importantly, the objectival status of the painting and its capacity (through the text’s use of the supernatural) to operate “beyond-the-subject-but-not” also echoes the epistemological position of Descartes’s imaginings in the structure of his argument.

Even in the first couple of pages, the text focuses on what can be shown, what can be created from what is shown, and the importance of what the subject shows to him or herself of him or herself. In “Aesthetics and Criminality in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*,” Paul Sheehan suggests that the novel works to highlight the “theatrical self,” which foregrounds the “fundamentally *undecidable* nature of performance” (333, original emphasis), taking pains to show the “the confusion, uncertainty, ambiguity and ultimate unknowability of the performing person” (333). At root in the text is the question of what can be known about a person in looking at his avatar or body, and the extent to which the connections between aesthetic representations of self are connected to some notion of a “true self.” Indeed, when Basil famously states of the painting, “I can’t really exhibit it. I have put too much of myself into it” (Wilde 6), the questions around and dangers of

the extent to which the subject can “place” himself into an object and an/other’s image are made clear. It is the sense of danger—or, at the very least, loss—that seems to frame Basil’s relationship to the painting and Dorian from the outset of the text:

When I like people immensely I never tell their names to anyone. It is like surrendering a part of them. I have grown to love secrecy. It seems to be one thing that can make modern life mysterious or marvellous to us. The commonest thing is delightful if only one hides it. (Wilde 7)

The surrender to the sign of the subject foreshadows the threat of the painting. But it also invokes a schism between the visual and the aural or spoken. The former cannot be hidden, except through the corruption of the supernatural; the latter, one can choose to obscure, a fact that significant in interesting ways in *Londonstani*.

As such, *A Picture of Dorian Gray* outlines the beginnings of a relationship between the subject and its aesthetic projection (something that, in a Wilde text so obviously concerned about unexpressed same-sex desire, will always remain meta-textual) as it also muddies which subjectivity is at stake, Dorian’s or Basil’s. As a matter of fact, Dorian himself and his power over Basil is described in “aesthetic”—or perhaps more accurately, artistic—terms:

What the invention of oil-painting was to the Venetians, the face of Antinous was to late Greek sculpture, and the face of Dorian Gray will someday be to me.... But in some curious way – I wonder will you understand me – his personality has

suggested to me an entirely new manner in art, an entirely new mode of style ... I can now recreate life in a way that was hidden from me before. (Wilde 13)

The insularity and singular unity of the subject is already dissipated, so much so that Dorian is “never more present in [Basil’s] work than when no image of him is there” (Wilde 14). If *Dorian Gray* is ostensibly about the moral decay of one man, then the text quite clearly invokes the decay as also one of the unitary subject in general, a chipping away that comes as a result of the-subject-as-art-object (or, later, vice-versa) to house or hold a component of subjectivity. Antonio Ballesteros González argues in “The Mirror of Narcissus in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*,” the novel “constitutes one of the most climactic steps in the Victorian study of duality” (3) and that the “process of going from an outer to an inner menace culminates with the development of psychoanalytic theories at the beginning of the twentieth century” (3). As such, in tying “the intrinsic knot between the individual and the object” (González 3), the novel explicitly maps out a kind of self-interpellation between an exterior surface and a bodily one—or, an image of the body and interior dimension of self.

The text quickly frames this dichotomous relationship between self and idealized projection as a discursive relationship between the subject and the circulation of its projection as enabled by the techne of the painting. Yet, as the text presents this phenomenon of what I might call the “techno-aesthetics of self,” Lord Henry simultaneously claims that that influence is immoral “because to influence a person is to give him his one’s own soul” (Wilde 20). Strangely, as the text invokes the multiplicity of

the self, it also seems to clamp down on the idea at the same time. When Lord Henry, for instance, claims that it is wrong if an influenced person “does not think his natural thoughts” (Wilde 20), he articulates clearly a vision of unitary selfhood. Interestingly, then, the text attempts to do two things at once: both to valorize *and* demonize the capacity of aesthetic representations of the subject to make the self somehow more than just one thing. In fact, this tension finds its articulation in the fact that Lord Henry consistently speaks in contradictions or paradoxes—almost as if the text itself is ideologically suspended between a desire to express things beyond the bounds of Victorian morality and the wish to stay within certain discursive limits.

Presented within a narrative frame of the relationship between desire, the aesthetic and the self, Lord Henry speaks to their realization through a recognition of their mutual interrelationship *in the virtual space* of the place or time to come. To be sure, it is important to note that Basil states to Lord Henry: “you never say a wrong thing, and you never do a wrong thing. Your cynicism is a pose” (Wilde 8). But if anything, it seems to cement my concern here, as Lord Henry is expressing through language the exceeding of Victorian morality through gestures towards aesthetic and aestheticized ideals. As a result, the painting’s virtuo-aesthetic position in the text as a literary and narrative mechanism for exploration is arguably thus the key focal point of how the text thinks through *techne* of self as, through Lord Henry, the novel itself metatextually functions in a similar manner.

A Legitimately Fake Self

If *A Picture of Dorian Gray* begins by foregrounding representation and aesthetics, then *Londonstani* immediately presents notions of identity politics and subjectivity as connected to language specifically. Hardjit's entrance into the text with the phrase "shudn't b callin me a Paki, innit" (3) very quickly establishes the centrality of racial identity and legitimacy, particularly because he insists: "we ain't bein called no fuckin Paki by u or by any other gora" (4). Even though Hardjit is careful to note that "technically" "a Paki is someone is who comes from Pakistan" (7), he is also clear that the word belongs to particular subjects, and that contravention of this norm will have him "cut'chyu up, innit" (4). One issue at stake is thus the inversion of subject position and social capital, as the ostensibly *desi*, South Asian narrator suggests that "these days, lager louts had got more to fear from us lot than us lot had to fear from them" (5). The text invokes the traditional understanding of lager louts as racists to be feared—such as the skinheads who linger threateningly at the edges of Hanif Kureishi's *Buddha of Suburbia*—and then flips it on its head, immediately foregrounding a shifting relationship between cultural capital and subject position. Additionally, the introduction, according to Ruvani Ranasinha is "significant not in terms of a simple reversal but in the way all his characters deploy 'ethnicity' as a way of bolstering their masculinity" (300).

Because both texts engage some obfuscation of character or identity—and also evaluate that phenomenon quite differently—what becomes important in a reading of *Londonstani*, particularly in terms of its emphasis on identity politics, is to think through

how and why the text articulates its construction of a subject that disturbs traditional understandings of not only bodily signification but also the *Bildungsroman* as a movement into a kind of unity itself predicated on that signification (i.e. when one grows up, one signifies properly as a man, hybrid immigrant, and so on). As Jas becomes a more concentrated version of himself, manifesting his desires of maturity, autonomy and masculinity, the text also undoes the fixity and stability of his racial identity. If the text expresses a narrative of self-actualization, then it treats that trajectory as both a movement toward and *through* something, turning his identity into a process or object that is at least doubled in spatio-temporal terms—of a body that exists in suspended relation to a virtual, discursive process of obfuscation. Ironically, Jas’s identity is doubled, being both a racialized subject position and a “hybrid” one that “supersedes” fixed racial subject positioning that ascribes a singular cultural identity to a particular body.

Although any novel tautologically constructs characters through language, *Londonstani*’s emphasis upon deliberately obscuring visual markers of identity in favour of linguistic ones makes its “constructive” language distinct. In “Escaping the Matrix: Illusions and Disillusions of Identity in Gautam Malkani’s *Londonstani*,” Michael Mitchell writes that “the novel’s opening strives for an immediate assertion of its own identity as a literary artefact through the self-referential expectation that the words should be written down, which is what they are of course, and through the description of the kicks in terms of punctuation” (332). In some sense, Malkani’s dialectal linguistic choice is one that seems to connote ethnography,²³ and the text can appear to aspire to a sort of social-realist function that, so to speak, “captures a slice of a culture.” But beyond the always-

problematic issues with ethnography's "object" of a culture, and ethnography's aims and means of representation-as-presentation, language in the text is also thematic and symbolic, working as an important screen in which linguistic codes and registers are invoked in order to connote cultural and subcultural specificity. Of note is that some of these registers are *only* noticeable visually in text, as the difference of "u gots 2 b", for example, would not be marked out in oral speech. As a result, the references to exclamation points and semi-colons in the novel's first lines—the "exclamation mark" that is in effect "punctuation [that] came with a kick" (3)—that describe the flow of Hardjit's violence seem also to foreground the relationship between language and the ongoing constitution of the subject as itself a linguistic, signifiatory process. Also of particular note is that if a kind of racial obfuscation is at the core of the novel, then text—by which I mean chirography and typography—forms what is perhaps the *only* viable narrative mechanism for the thrust and conceit of the plot.

As a result, the status of language and its relation to subjectivity becomes a central concern of the text. Jas's movement into the subject position of "*desi*" or "rudeboy" is initially hampered by his diction, as he "can't attain the right level of rudeboy authenticity ... [instead] using poncey words like attain an authenticity" (Malkani 6). Yet, at the same time, it is precisely "linguistic prowess and debating dexterity" (Malkani 6) that Jas seeks. This is to say that Jas is seeking to articulate the right vision of identity in verbal language, yet also its sound (dictional tone, rhythm and timing of phrasing) in order to self-actualize. But, at the same time, this speaking is also an ongoing, performative articulation of an identity that, according to essentialist racial discourse,

“cannot exist.” As Mitchell argues, the text “conforms to Mikhail Bakhtin’s conception of language as an *object* of representation” (332, original emphasis), such that there is a doubled performativity at work, that of the text and the language of the text. In a related vein, in James Graham’s “This Isn’t Goodwill Hunting: *Londonstani* and the market for London’s multicultural fictions” from *The Literary London Journal*, argues that “*Londonstani* self-consciously mimics the way subculture is *performed*, rather than representing the way religious, racial or ethnically defined communities live” (original emphasis) thus foregrounding not simply the performativity of identity, but its performativity through language and language-as-cultural-object.

If Dorian’s wish, as instigated by Lord Henry and the painting, was to experience life and the senses as fully as he could, then Jas’s quest is that of the more traditional *Bildungsroman*: to become a better, more actualized version of himself. Jas’s deep lament over his “lack a rudeboyesque panache” (Malkani 7) is a clear marker of his doubled identity as being both *desi* and the “ponces [who] read the news on the BBC” (Malkani 6). Occupying the space in between is unacceptable within a discourse of the authentic. Similarly, the homophobic, masculinist language of “batty boys” and “ungay facial hair” (8) sets forth a similar concern with masculinity and adherence to some sort of unspoken code. In a sense, Jas is looking to speak himself into being. When he chats right, he will be right—and will thus see himself as right.

At the outset, then, the issue of occupying a subject position legitimately and deliberately to invoke the impossible, in full presence, is central. But to return to my

primary concern, what is of import here is how and where Jas locates and performs this legitimacy. In *A Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian uses the painting as a method of offloading the assumed relationship between the body and moral action. In *Londonstani*, however, there is no focal object *in* the narrative. There is only text and discursive formation *of* the narrative and meta-narrative of the novel, and as a related function the obfuscation of the visually identified body itself. As a result, what one must consider is textual performance and performativity as a kind of virtual screen placed in front of the body—one through which the body can still be seen, but cannot be witnessed unaltered. It is the logic of the hologram and its translucent, diaphanous nature that is at play here. And at the core of *Londonstani* is a spatial metaphor, similar to that which exists in Descartes, of the constitutive, dialectical relationship between the body as read through normative racial hermeneutics and of text as a virtual suspended in front of a body that affords Jas a particular sort of social capital and currency. The hologram in this instance is, contra some of its contemporary expression in the predominantly visual logic of Facebook, Instagram, and other photo-heavy platforms, a “hologram of text,” a narrativized textual construction that stands for a subject in an economy of signification.

This “objectless” dialectic mirrors certain patterns of usage in the digital virtual. According to Sherry Turkle, “the computer is evocative not only because of its holding power, but because holding power creates the condition for other things to happen... the computer, like a Rorschach inkblot test, is a powerful projective medium” (*Second Self* 14). Projection, particularly in its filmic resonances, is an interesting metaphor, as it is spatial, invoking a self and an external canvas onto which the projection occurs. Yet the

canvas is also itself analogous to many other things, namely the imagination, “media,” public space, and so on. For that reason Turkle suggests that digitality is “a constructive as well as projective medium” (15), in which “the computer’s chameleon-like quality... makes it an ideal medium for the construction of a wide variety of private worlds and, through them, for self-exploration” (*Second Self* 15). As such, Jas’s process of self-construction, particularly as “enabled” by the technologies of not simply “textspeak” but also textuality in general, is operating in relation to a model of self-construction that echoes the structural and epistemological concerns of the digital virtual. It is also for this reason that a text that does not mention the internet can still be said to invoke the logic of the digital virtual. Indeed, it is just this oblique reference to a “structural” logic that allows for concept such as the holographic self.

At the same time, another frame of the movement into legitimacy in this novel is also intimately tied to economic structures. Jas’s insistence that he sees “faces in cars” (Malkani 18) evokes a link between subjectivity or identity and commodities. When Jas says, “before I got tight with Hardjit’s crew, I tended to like smaller cars” (Malkani 18), the text clearly invokes a parallel teleological narrative structure that maps Jas’s movement into a legitimized identity onto the accumulation of material markers of success. Importantly, however, the two function differently in signification: if the acquisition of a car is to be read according to certain normative standards of conspicuous consumption, then at this point the narrative Jas’s aim is for his body to be read against those same normative standards. To become a proper *Desi* would require an obfuscation of his skin colour, an arguably non-normative inversion that reverses another sort of

global teleology: the movement of minorities both literally and figuratively west toward whiteness. Although Jas's racial position remains obscured to the reader at this point, the sense of a goal in the future is clear, even though the "twist" is yet to come: "I just wish I was as sorted as Hardjit is, that's all" (Malkani 29). The aim here is not *necessarily* the occupation of a *specific* racial identity as much as it is the "legitimate" occupation of a subject position in general—even, or perhaps especially, as that subject position complicates neatly essentialist readings of "an" identity, such as in the complex hybridity of *desi*-ness which adopts and appropriates not only Punjabi and Hindi terms, as well as African-American, Caribbean ones, in addition to the evolving idiom of Multicultural London English.²⁴ Returning to James Graham, writing online in the *London Literary Journal*:

Londonstani re-writes the dominant (and from Williams' account, quintessentially *English*) idea of community in two ways: through its narrative structure and its language. Firstly, the shifting ethnic registers of the novel's narrative arc – Paki, Sher, Desi – allegorizes and conflates the narrative of post-war British-Asian settlement, but without attempting to represent it as being either universal or authentic. Secondly, it does this through a carefully constructed, or as Malkani puts it, 'future-proof' urban creole. The language not so much reproduces as mimics the way certain subcultures resist or, to use Malkani's term, *disrespects* majoritarian culture by appropriating and reworking its proper linguistic codes. (original emphasis)

The aim is to produce some kind of virtualized identity that skitters away from or exceeds the constraints of normativity, and does so through the invocation of a specific—but ironic—urban creole.

The text thus sets in action a “goal to come,” the movement into a legitimate, actualized identity. But since the text performs this movement not as a resolution of an inside and outside space—of a concordance of interior desires and an exterior discursive field in which the body is allowed to “signify properly”—it becomes necessary to ask what epistemological conditions are necessary for the text to invoke this arguably novel, “dis-unified” approach to its own teleology. What I am asking here is whether it is legitimate to read the internet and the World Wide Web as part of the ideological and discursive ground upon which the text constructs its narrative “progression.”

Referring to the posting of (self)images online, Eric Freedman suggests the following about the hermeneutic framework of (self)projection:

The networked identity is complex. Its composition may be planned, but the performance is always grounded in a specific context; the context may shift over time, but it is fixed from moment to moment by an act of interpretation attached to a reader in the here and now. As participants familiarize themselves with the network’s contours and its circulation, they become more adept in the construction of their online selves, but there is still no guarantee that they will construct a stable persona. (149)

As such, a foregrounding of the capacity to self-constitute an image of the self in knowledge of certain contextual constraints—such as essentialist discourses of the body and racial identity—also foregrounds the performative construction of the self on a moment-to-moment basis. As such, I argue that *Londonstani* invokes this ability for self-construction as an effect of the broader possibilities of self-inscription and reception enabled by the digital virtual, and that furthermore, that effect is predicated on the existence of a broad non-bodily hermeneutic field in which the visibility of the body is “effaced,” however provisionally and temporarily. To understand how *Londonstani* might express subjectivity as indicative of the temporal and spatial multiplicity that is part of virtual subjectivity, however, it first seems necessary to establish the manner in which *A Picture of Dorian Gray* differently employs and deploys art as virtual space, so that one might have a place from which to argue that *Londonstani* is in fact a novel that invokes the epistemology of the digital virtual.

The Offline Jekyll and Online Hyde

The question of legitimacy, particularly as it relates to the relationship between individual action and an implied set of social mores, is also at the forefront of *Dorian Gray*. But legitimacy in *Dorian Gray* functions differently, if analogously, to *Londonstani*. If legitimacy means the capacity to perform cultural capital and identity in concordance with a set of normative social standards, then in Wilde’s text, Dorian’s search is, like Jas’s, to present himself as legitimate, but also to engage in activities that a split identity

affords him. When Dorian comes under the influence of Lord Henry Wotton, however, the split becomes foregrounded. Note the emphasis in Dorian's reaction to Lord Henry's waxing aestheticism: "The few words that Basil's friend has said to him – words spoken by chance, no doubt, and *with wilful paradox in them* – had touched some secret chord that had never been touched before, but that he felt was now vibrating and throbbing to curious pulses" (Wilde 21, emphasis mine).

The strangely random words that point to a discursively impossible space that melds responsibility, a transcendent ideal and the embrace of bodily desires is framed as a paradox, as things that cannot be suspended in agreement. This moment in the text eventually engenders a split in Dorian, one for which significantly Dorian has no words: "I don't know what to say. There is some answer to you, but I cannot find it" (21). Another gesture toward the unsayable something is that "music stirred him like that.... But music was not articulate" (Wilde 22), significant because of instrumental music's "a-linguistic" nature. As Paul Sheehan points out:

For the nineteenth-century aesthete or decadent, the desire to escape the demands of a physical, naturalistic reality is achieved most effectively through liminal states of consciousness—reverie, fantasy, hallucination, mystical vision or trance-like states of mind, all exemplifying the transformative power of artificial sensation. They provide access points to a self-contained world of the imagination, a nocturnal escape route from the constraints of Victorian conformity. (335)

The movement “beyond” must operate at an almost affective level, or at least a non-linguistic one, and though the lack of any clear description of the book likely has as much to do with moral policing as it does narrative tension, it still points to this relationship between what is said, felt, and allowed.

In his essay, “That Strange Interesting in Trivial Things: Seduction in Derrida and *Dorian Gray*,” Forbes Morlock suggests this initial encounter is “not so much a sexual scene as a scene of the entry into sexuality, that is, the entry into desire” (71). Yet, this scene, he argues, works because of its meta-textuality. Lord Henry’s influence is to awaken an already-present, if largely dormant, desire within Dorian. Morlock suggests that “what comes from outside is somehow already inside” (71), and thus “it is hardly an accident, then, that *Dorian Gray*’s very next scene involves the first articulation of its young hero’s desire” (71). Morlock argues this point in order to reconfigure questions of seduction and desire as “penetrative” acts of corruption. But in doing so, he also outlines the meta-textual aspirational quality to the narrative:

Dorian’s wish is always also the articulation of our own childhood desire in the face of fiction, namely that we can trade places with the lifeless, timeless character before our eyes.... Suspended between present fear and imminent pleasure, our seduction is a state of knowing that we want to know, that knowledge is wanting.

(72)

Dorian cannot find the resolution of the kind of desire Lord Henry expressed within the “normal” constraints of Victorian discourse, itself similar to the manner the text itself

cannot find expression for same-sex desire in the same material-ideological framework. It is this point of “wilful paradox” that sets Dorian towards a path of “exceeding” Victorian morality. If Victorian morality acts as a mechanism to store and then pressurize the libidinal, then the painting of Dorian is a release valve.

As Christopher Craft says in the opening of “Come See About Me: Enchantment of the Double in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*,” “when a rapt Dorian Gray stands before his portrait, therein to consider both himself and his difference from himself, he requires a prosthesis. A prosthesis so familiar it hardly seems like one. Dorian requires a mirror” (109). But Craft also echoes this notion of a circumscribed “escape,” arguing that “a viewing subject replicated in a mirror may be said return where she started, but *as* she started” (109, original emphasis). The construction of Dorian as a kind of figure for the functioning of aesthetics seems heightened by his backstory and Lord Henry’s conniving. Dorian’s “interesting background... posed the lad, made him more perfect as it were” (Wilde 37), and his life is seen by Lord Henry as “almost modern romance” (Wilde 37). Perhaps more interestingly, Lord Henry looks at his effect on Dorian as an experiment in influence, one that seems similarly framed in terms of the flight and return of the aesthetic:

To project one’s soul into some gracious form, and let it tarry there for a moment; to hear one’s own intellectual views echoed back to one with all the added music of passion and youth; to convey one’s temperament into another as though it were a subtle fluid or a strange perfume: there was a real joy in that – perhaps the most

satisfying joy let to us in an age so limited and vulgar as our own, an age grossly carnal in its pleasures. (37)

Dorian is thus a kind of screen for the projections of Lord Henry's moral experiments. The discourse of the self as a fluid or ether, itself a kind of mimetic screen for Lord Henry onto which to project the things he himself cannot do, produces a doubling of aesthetic projections of selfhood: of Dorian and his painting; and Lord Henry and Dorian. That Dorian might be "a marvellous type ... or could be fashioned into a marvellous type" (Wilde 37) only heightens the archetypal, idealized position of Dorian as outlet and projection for Lord Henry's constraint under Victorian morality. The eventual realization that Lord Henry would "seek to dominate him ... [and] make that wonderful *spirit* his own" (Wilde 38, emphasis mine) cements the idea that Dorian is a structure through which Lord Henry, the text, and possibly Wilde project an excess over and against Victorian morality in order to articulate (and then, eventually, disavow) an aestheticist, bodily ideology into a repressive, anti-sensual ideological structure.

The moral frame within which the relationship of self and projection is constructed is also clear, and arguably "anti-virtual." After Dorian invokes (and Basil questions) Lord Henry's penchant for paradoxical inversions of Victorian morality, the latter's reply is intriguing: "To be good is to be in harmony with one's self.... Discord is to be forced into harmony with others" (Wilde 76). Within Lord Henry's virtual construction of morality (for he does not seem to act upon his words), to live in discord between an interior set of desires and external projection of social conformity is to betray

one's responsibility to one's self. So while this equation is formulated within a Wildeian rhetoric of aestheticism, it is also an expression of its inverse: if you cannot indulge your desires openly, then you should not indulge at all. In other words, to be in disagreement with one's avatar is the greatest of sins; one must live in concordance with one's projected, idealized self. What else is aestheticism but an attempt to make manifest a virtual projection of one's desired self-to-come? Unsurprisingly, then, to Dorian the protagonist of the so-called exotic, oriental book given to him by Lord Henry "became to him a kind of prefiguring type of himself" (Wilde 123).

The painting, then, obviously becomes the physical manifestation of the text's moralizing. But the "subtle affinity between the chemical atoms, that shaped themselves into form and colour on the canvas, and the soul that was within [Dorian]" (Wilde 93) is not simply there to provide narrative tension. Instead, it is a way of materially enforcing an anti-aestheticist morality upon the virtual projection of such a philosophy. This is to say that there is an obvious meta-textual dimension to the painting: it is the narrative mechanism through which Wilde can express aestheticist philosophy as itself an aesthetic construct, while it is "contained" and therefore made safe within the aesthetic "frame" of Basil's supernaturally accurate depiction of Dorian's soul: "For there would be real pleasure in watching [the painting]. He would be able to follow his mind into its secret places. This portrait would be to him the most magical of mirror. As it had revealed to him his own body, so it would reveal to him his own soul" (Wilde 103). Thus, the painting makes the impossible possible through its aestheticization of the soul and moral punishment.

This enabling of the impossible, however, is the status of the visual and text. “If one doesn’t talk about a subject, it has never happened,” says Dorian. “It is simply expression that gives reality to things” (104). This is to say that entering Dorian’s sins into discourse is to make them subject to discursive economy of exchange. To render things only visually is to also render them mute. In much the same way that Dorian’s desires initially had no words—and indeed, are subject to circumlocution by the narrator—here he must again suppress words. The capacity of words to be discursively sublated into existing, normative discourses echoes again in *Londonstani*, when Jas and the text must constantly suppress full-names-as-signifiers in order to have the conceit of the text continue to function. What contemporary identity politics is to *Londonstani*, late Victorian morality is to *A Picture of Dorian Gray*. That Dorian “would adopt certain modes of thought that he knew to be alien to his nature” (127) marks his trying on of subjectivities. Unlike Jas, however, Dorian’s reward is not, at least in the holistic moral frame of the text, reward or self-actualization, but punishment.

The issue, then, is through what type of ideological, epistemological, and aesthetic constraints is that relationship constructed in texts. In *Dorian Gray*, the relation is clearly both simultaneously aesthetic and supernatural, such that the painting becomes a virtualized projection of an escape from the socio-ideological definitions of what is acceptable. But in *Londonstani*, the projected subject is “textual,” i.e. it can *only* exist in text. Any visual representation of Jas (such as might occur in a theoretical film version of the book, lest it be shot only in POV (single subject point of view)) would obviously “give the game away.” So the status of Jas as a literary construct becomes perhaps heightened

as, more than most constructs in fiction, he exists firmly as a product of text. Indeed, if Dorian Gray escapes normative constraint through his capacity to obscure the visual, to not have age or sin inscribed upon his face, Jas's obscuring is one of text, of the capacity to present himself through text and thereby escape the normativity of the visual and its connection to identity politics or the body as racialized text.

The capacity somehow to enact impossibility in *Londonstani*, however, seems more meta-textual: namely, that it is the aesthetic structure of text and literature itself that allows for Jas to occupy an impossible subjectivity. If the painting in *Dorian Gray* is the virtual mechanism through which Dorian elides normative readings, then in *Londonstani* that virtual space through and in which Jas can exist as “*desi*” is virtually suspended in two fields—in the socio-discursive world of the text, but also in the space between the novel itself and the reader. Crucially, if in *Dorian Gray* it is an art object that functions as virtual space that absorbs the moral actions of Dorian, then in Malkani’s text, that object is virtually suspended in the social—or indeed, is not an object at all. Reading Jas’s body in non-normative ways is enabled by the location of his cultural identity within the networks of language, discourse and the social, and the fact that these networks can operate persistently and with material effect in the absence of the visual sign of the body. The textualization of self—itself meta-textually invoked through the use of textspeak in the novel *and* the way in which Jas’s white identity is obscured through “textual” means—is the medium that functions as an interface for intersubjective relations, but also the interface for the reader’s entrance into the narrative. Although one might read the lack of any virtual version of Jas as a return of sorts—an Ongian vision of

sociality in which the subject locates itself in the virtually suspended space of the social—one can also do the inverse reading. The text's construction of the protagonist's fluid, socially located subjectivity employs not simply an ideology that is "social first", but rather one that is network first, one which invokes the location of subjectivity in a spatio-temporally multiple suspension between the body and virtual networks. The virtual object is the projection of the subject within the networked fields of Jas's social world and his own understanding of himself.

A Virtual Desi Self

My argument to this point calls forth the necessity of positing a mode of reading that foregrounds the logic of digitality in which the representation of the subject is based on the epistemological ground of the digital virtual as a discursive and experiential sphere that presents as a persistent field, virtually suspended in a simultaneous spatio-temporal relationship to other forms of discourse, including "reality." Further to this, however, the argument is also one of fantasy: that the textualized hybrid self of *Londonstani* is deployed strategically in order to arrive at a manifested version of that fantasy. Thought of in this light, *Londonstani* can be read as an expression of a shift in the ground of the subject that employs and even perhaps celebrates the virtual as a kind of obfuscatory field that renders readings of the body and the subject in light of their multiple expressions in multiply signifying fields. Furthermore, the idea that *Londonstani* invokes the epistemological ground of digital virtual subjects rather than the internet

itself seems a compelling argument for the difference of the text's moral framing of the "escape into impossibility": it is engaged in the subject-ive consequence of the phenomenology of virtual technologies rather than in their specific representation. What it means, however, that the text ultimately casts off this relational structure between body and phantasmatic object remains to be seen.

I argue, then, that the text's virtuo-aesthetic undercurrent sets up a meta-textual dimension to the novel, such that the reader's relationship to text and its reliance upon the imagination becomes a key element in *Londonstani*'s main conceit. Put another way, the reader is asked to accept that for the duration of the text, Jas has simultaneously operated as a doubled subject: a bodily Jas and a virtual, discursive Jas. As the fictional image of Jas is projected by the reader into his/her imagination, Jas too projects numerous "fictions" of a split between a racialized body and culturally located subject position. Yet this split is one that the novel also seems to resist initially or at least superficially. Hardjit becomes the narrative voice for a discourse of so-called authentic identity, particularly highlighted by his berating of the "coconut" who, he claims, is "embarrass'd a [his] own culture" (Malkani 22). At the same time, Jas's suggestion that the adherence to that discourse is a choice—"He'd made a choice just like I made a choice when I started kickin bout with Hardjit" (Malkani 23)—suggests that the text's deployment of authenticity and its relation to identity politics is already contingent upon affiliation, something that Jas's eventual alienation and independence (which are themselves other forms of escape) seems to critique.

Thus Jas's long tirade of self-reproach about his inability to speak (Malkani 30) sets in motion the traditional teleology of the *Bildungsroman*, yet one that is about a doubling or multiplicity. For Jas, "it's as if there's some other voice a mine givin it" (30), constantly reprimanding his ability to articulate his masculine subject position in right way. To wit, "you can't pull if you can't fuckin talk, can you?" (Malkani 31). An internalized voice of external value judgments constantly dogs Jas's consciousness: "Obviously this voice must know that actually it can't speak up, that it can't talk cos it's me, innit, it's my voice. But it keeps trying. An then another voice, I reckon that makes three fuckin voices, will go, Boy? In't no fuckin boy. In't no girl either but in't no fuckin boy" (30).

To return to Nusselder, what is invoked here is a desire for a superseding of a lack. As the Lacanian theorist argues, "computer media numb the awareness of our inadequacies and defects because of the fascinating images they depict of us" (90). Jas's doubled self-projection—the explicit textual construction of a *desi* self, and the implied projection of Jas-as-who-he-is-meant-be-and-to-come—is not, Nusselder argues, "a malicious process ... [but] a tension between the immediacy of sensations and its objectification in the ego" (90). In fact, it is the very capacity to "objectify" the ego that characterises digital media, as the simple availability of "technologies of objectification"—by which I mean widely available social platforms to produce an objectified or aesthetic version of the self—enables that process. Again, to return to a central point, this is not "new", but the scale and scope at which this process is possible is

in fact novel, which has socio-historical consequences that, I argue, are expressed in the logic of texts such as *Londonstani*.

This is to say that Jas's process of "self-interpellation" that I initially formulated in relation to Descartes and Ong is here about a process of quasi-hailing, in which the plurality of social voices must accord with "the inner" one in order for the subject to actualize (if by actualize we simply here mean arrive at a "self-determined" point of maturation or change). Jas willingly steps into a speech community in which chatting right is akin to the correct presentation of self in a social space of secondary orality—something that repeats the well-established phenomenon of British accents and dialects being positioned in relation to an assumed norm or centre. This is the centrifugal pressure on the relation between the self and virtualized social space. If part of what makes orality and virtuality analogous is a somewhat similar relationship between the self and the persistent virtuo-social in the imagination, then we catch here a glimmer of how *Londonstani* expresses a differing sense of subjectivity than *A Picture of Dorian Gray*. If in the latter novel, Dorian's eventual downfall is a result of his virtuo-supernatural capacity to exceed the social, then Jas's success stems from his ability similarly to supersede social constraint, but to do so in a manner that does not carry punitive consequence. As I shall argue, this ability is not only the ambivalent effect of both Jas's white privilege *and* the shifting social capital ascribed *desi* identity; it is also bound up in the dialectic of the autonomous, "authentic" self and the virtual occupation of provisional subjectivities.

If the textual function of the painting is not just to allow for, but also to capture Dorian's "excess," then its metatextual purpose is to frame that excess in terms of desire, repression, and aestheticism. Keeping a similar sense of the virtual as a literary lens in mind, Jas's "impossible" racial identity can thus be read as a literary experiment of sorts. But if the issue in *Londonstani* is obviously about a necessary linkage between a subject position and a racialized body, then it is the frame that becomes important. While the novel's conceit asserts a division between the body and its racially essentialized reading, it does so in the terms of the *Bildungsroman*. To wit, Jas's performance of a *desi* identity is a movement from one state to another, a passage *through* something so that he emerges better, faster and stronger on the other side.

Both Jas and Dorian exist in materially impossible spaces, sustained by fiction, but also the phenomenology of text—its linearity, its capacity to produce synecdoches of the subject, offloaded, partial aspects of subjectivity that are placed within relations of semiotic and discursive exchange. Thus, the ideological and philosophical underpinnings of their movements through each respective text are of some import. After all, if the "teleology" of *Dorian Gray* eventually contains and punishes Dorian's capacity to exceed socio-ideological norms, then what does Jas's comparative "success" mean? Similarly, one might ask whether such a resolution differs in either its understanding of racial politics or subjectivity from the ostensibly assimilationist bent of novels like *Buddha of Suburbia*, in which Karim arrives at relative stability through a hybrid position that subsumes difference to an ideal of Britishness—an assimilationist ideal that has in the early twenty-first century has been complicated by the emergence of creolized or hybridized linguistic

forms such as Multicultural London English, that draw on both Caribbean and South Asian vernaculars to produce a new form of British English.²⁵

If the logic of *Buddha* is assimilationist hybridity, then in *Londonstani* it is the overlap of capitalism, autonomy and masculinity. Jas's entire movement through identities and modes is done in order to arrive at a more successful version of himself. Nusselder posits that there are two possibilities for the fantasy of self: that which provide for "new appearances of the real" (102) or those that let us "take the reality of the screen for the real thing itself" (102). The "real subject" is thus not a question of authenticity, but is something effaced by the "disunity [between] the subject and the unavoidable (fantasmatic) subjectivation" (102) in which the "actual" self can be a source of horror and is thus obscured by phantasmatic self-projections or repression. Interestingly, however, in *Londonstani* the desire for an idealized, actualized self overlaps with the desire of ideals in general: of Sanjay as a model of success, who himself models his performance of wealth; and Samira as an ideal of femininity. The description of Sanjay's apartment (Malkani 152-153) and Jas's imitation of Sanjay seem to highlight this overlapping desire, as does the description of Samira as a woman "way outta' most guys' leagues" (Malkani 63). Perhaps most importantly, it is impossible to ignore the description of Hardjit as "good looking" or of his "gorgeous arms" (Malkani 105). Jas sees in Hardjit an idealized version of the subject, equal parts desired and feared, and though it is plausible that the homoeroticism is Malkani's satiric take on rudeboy culture, the centrality of desire in the relation between Jas and the numerous projections in relation to which Jas inscribes and orients himself, whether virtual or "real," seems key.

Yet the text runs together two differing teleological goals: one of Jas reaching “proper rudeboy status”—itself a term which is an appropriation from Jamaican culture—and, more generally, autonomy and individualism. However, under this duality are two more competing streams: one of adherence to a “rudeboy code” and another that is largely liberal-humanist ideology: equality and the idea that “all fights should be settled in a more Gandhi-fied way” (Malkani 108). Narrative tension in the text develops from the two competing streams, each of a different socio-ideological ethos. But it is also these competing ideas that generate a division between inner and outer. The inner-outer split is not one the text engages through a contrast of only inner thought and action. It is an “outer-outer” split too, in which Jas presents as one subject to Hardjit et al, and another to Samira and others. At the outset, the novel’s “Sher” section, where Jas reveals that “in the end [he] ignored everybody” particularly Hardjit, who “didn’t have a sense of humour bout mixed couples” (Malkani 145), sets up another layer to the multiplicity of Jas’s identity. In fact, the duplicity or doubleness of Jas only ends when he discards his explicitly *desi* identity and, to use the logic of the text, becomes himself—by which I mean that he occupies a position the text itself has constructed as “authentic to Jas”, almost as if it is hybridity-as-telos.

In that sense, the specific character of hybridity expressed by Jas/on takes on a phantasmatic quality. It is the thing that “cannot be,” at least according to a strict link between racialized bodies and “minority” identities, and yet is desired as the ultimate expression of the text’s trajectory. What is more, if “computer objects allow us to control and manipulate the world to make it ‘emotionally safe’” (Nusselder 108) in such a

manner, such as in games or in the process of subjective self-representation, as to defend oneself with “the phantasmatic idea [one] can control time and death” (Nusselder 108) among other things, then there is an analogous structure between the digital and this particular textual expression of “the lost object” of a fluid, liberal humanist notion of hybridity that is available to all and effaces the visibility of the body.

Although the text’s ending on “Shukriya” (Malkani 342)—the Persian-derived Punjabi word for thank you—seems to invoke a hybrid identity, the novel still presents a logic of inner and outer: of a self that enters into socio-discursive relations of exchange in order to be read against normative hermeneutics of the racialized body. The text sets up a model of a bodily subject that, through its own sense of agency, becomes one node within the dialectical structure of identity as performative process. Whether or not this autonomy ascribed to the subject is politically responsible from a critical race perspective is, for the purposes of my work here, less important than its epistemological underpinning. If part of the politics of this text is the inversion of the dynamics of cultural capital ascribed to particular racial identities—an approach that might usually draw loud condemnations from postcolonial critics as being naive, premature or irresponsible—then the question is this: Does *Londonstani* indirectly invoke the modal function of digital virtual subjectivity in order also to invoke its reliance upon the virtual as an additional field for the circulation of cultural capital—one that is not entirely subsumed by pre-existing normative constructions of racial subject positions? Put another way, if Jas/on’s reliance on white privilege to move in and out of identities might easily be read as an uncritical representation or expression of that privilege, does the very

existence of digitality complicate the “expected” critical race studies reading of the text, i.e. that Jas’s fluidity is uncritical or is the kind of representation that should be criticized? What does the holographic self actually do to the desire for “responsible racial representation”?

The Corporeal Capital of a Rudeboy Identity

As a brief detour to answer to that question, I want to turn to Ori Schwarz’s “On Friendship, Boobs and the Logic of the Catalogue: Online Self-Portraits as a Means for the Exchange of Capital.” Schwarz examines the use of Israeli social networking site (SNS) *Shox* in order to understand the exchange of images online as the exchange of social capital. Of note is that “the field-specific interest on which *Shox* users struggle is stardom, or “celebrityness” (Schwarz 168), a process that occurs through the exchange and evaluation of self-portraiture. Schwarz pays close attention to the overlap in the circulation of capital between the bodily and the virtual through the exchange of both bodily and “non-bodily” visual signifiers. As Schwarz notes, “those who did manage to achieve social capital in *Shox* found that it is not confined to the site: both unofficial “celebrity” status and official friendship’ ties accompany their bearers in other contexts” (169).

To this dynamic, Schwarz adds the idea of corporeal capital, a term that borrows from both Bordieu and Baudrillard to mean a capital rooted in bodies “which promises access to power in some spheres but brings about delegitimization in others” (171).

Schwarz argues that photos “are carriers of corporeal capital” in which “users choose different sorts of representation, corresponding to their different resources” (171), where these “resources” are various markers of corporeal capital like attractiveness, bodily modification, in addition to knowledge of stylistic camera techniques. The circulation of these images according to various desired qualities—aesthetic, innovative etc.—means that *Shox*’s visual economy is thus based on conversion between different forms of capital: corporeal capital (manifested in bodily features) and local cultural capital (the knowledge needed to produce a conventionalized photo, including technical mastery of camera and graphic software as well as mastery of the relevant aesthetic codes and conventions) are materialized and objectified as photos, which, in turn, are convertible into social capital, that is, social ties and status. (Schwarz 172).

It must be noted that Schwarz undertakes this analysis to argue that the insertion of sexualized self-portraits into relations of discursive exchange leaves individuals subject to potential delegitimization. But Schwarz also argues that the photos are productive—that “they produce value for both the user qua image entrepreneur and site operators, [yet] they also produce sociability, social bonds, channels of gift exchange, and standards for social hierarchization and organization” (180). Note the analogous relationship to *Londonstani* here. Self-presentation is a mixture of both normative cultural understanding and its subjective reconfiguration *through* an amalgam of both bodily and virtual capital. The capacity to move “successfully” through relations of social exchange is found in the interdependence of a bodily subject and a temporal, spatial field that is simultaneously co-existent with the discourses that make up reality. To complete the

circle, as it were, the simultaneity of the digital virtual and body is an analog of Descartes in his small room: a bodily subject exists in dialectical relationship with the imagined projection of a subject in the virtualized field, wherein the crucial difference is that the virtualized social field is accessible multiply and simultaneously by other subjects. To wit, the virtual gives ground to the imagination, or makes it manifest without giving it shape. It is almost a logic of subjectivity, an expansion of the nodes of matrinal relations through and on which subjectivity functions in economies of discourse and sociality—but which carries a desire for the manifestation of the self as the ego-ideal. I will theorize this relationship more thoroughly in subsequent chapters (it is obviously an enormous topic), but for the purpose of this analysis it seems important to point out that Schwarz critiques the online exchange of capital because it subsumes representations of subjects into evaluative economies that reify existing normative standards. I should note, however, that this point is something to be contested, as it relies upon an understanding of the normative signification of body *through* a non-digital understanding of signification itself.

For now, however, reading Schwarz's article in parallel with the other texts in this study points to a set of analogous relationships: between a body and virtuality; and a body and the imagination; and a body and the aesthetic. It is the dialectical relationship between the two spheres that enables, variously, Descartes's understanding of subjectivity, Dorian's superseding of Victorian norms and Jas's reconfigured racialized identity as a mechanism for self-actualization. But perhaps most importantly, Schwarz's work points to the mutual co-dependence of projections of the body and bodily markers

as a co-existent with the body itself, producing an expanded field of social relations in which the body and the various projections that form the text of the avatar or online profile exist concurrently. It is this logic of subjectivity—one that includes both bodily signification and the reconfiguration of texts of identity through the concurrent existence of a virtual field and bodily-social one – that underpins *Londonstani*. The issue at stake, then, is one of presentation—or, perhaps more accurately, self-presentation. In presenting the text of the body to social and discursive relations of exchange, how is the subject not only read, but also a participant in a reconfiguration of that reading? Some consideration of this obscuring process is necessary.

Chat Like Your Avatar

(Self)Presentation is frequently bound up intimately with language. And the beginning of the “Sher” section of *Londonstani* is especially interesting in marking out the text’s use of language, as it is written mostly in second person, a mode that is both rare and difficult to perform in aesthetically satisfying ways. On one level, the section presents Jas narrating to himself the process by which he enters a actualized, masculine, identity. It is no coincidence, after all, that he is narrating the process by which he is “stepping into” and then “learning to properly use” a Porsche; he is figuratively describing what it is to “become someone” performatively. But “you” has another use here, that of the “interpellative” space speaking Jas’s identity into being, the performative identity structured in relation to an ideal.

Here, the ideal is clearly Sanjay: “sometimes, when he’s givin you all these tips, Sanjay smiles in a way that reminds you a the way your mum used to look at you when you were practising piano” (Malkani 142). But the use of the second person speaks to the interpellative process of being called upon, and in the section it is unclear whether Jas is speaking to himself or speaking to a formless reader who also is waiting to be shaped. Thus, the text asserts what I argue are three poles of idealization in relation to which Jas orients himself: Hardjit, the model of rudeboy *desi* identity; Mr. Ashwood, the figure of white, liberal philosophy; and Sanjay, the ideal of masculinity, capitalism and cultural capital. This dynamic makes the use of second person poignant, as Jas is performing the complex inner-outer dynamic through which subject-constitution occurs by way of a process of identification and performativity. As Jas ignores Hardjit’s proscriptions against cross-faith dating and embraces Sanjay’s insistence that he should, he also tells himself, “you searched your brain’s hard drive” (Malkani 143) for what he should do, which at the very least, emphasizes the fluid nature of Jas’s identity as it adopts an amalgam of its various influencers: Jas the adaptable avatar who takes on features of other personas.

But Sanjay is not only an ideal; he is an alternative ideal. His lavish house has “none a that hallway full of shoes... none a those pictures a Sikh Gurus, Hindus statues or signs saying God Bless” (Malkani 152), marking it as a site of difference from the mainstream vision of immigrant, South Asian homes. Instead it has “Bang & Olufsen’s latest BeoVision integrated audio-visual system ... [and] lights underneath the glass floor” (Malkani 152). Sanjay is a parodic exemplar of capitalist excess, someone for whom “normality has always been a bit too plain vanilla” (Malkani 154). He is an ideal of wealth

that the boys themselves aspire to emulate, a point made clear by the fact “he got the idea for all this from that *Cribs* show” (Malkani 153). This, so to speak, is how a true gangsta lives. And he too looks at subjects as things to be molded, as he seeks “to turn [the boys] into assets” (163). Sanjay argues, “there’s no Marxist alternative anymore” (Malkani 168), and thus asks the boys to commit themselves fully to yet another ideal, albeit an amoral one: abandon oneself to the endless pursuit of an ever-receding goal.

But if desire forms a kind of “useful teleology” for Jas, this is not the case for Dorian. Since Dorian’s goal of actualization exists outside and beyond social norms, it is not a desire that can be articulated. The painting, therefore, must be hidden, both to hide Dorian’s unacceptable behaviour, but also Basil’s “unacceptable desire” for Dorian. As Basil says after the confession of his clearly homoerotic idolatry, “perhaps one should never put one’s worship into words” (Wilde 112), a notion made especially poignant by the fact that he, and by extension Wilde, almost literally cannot. After all, “Dorian Gray had been poisoned by a book” (Wilde 140). The “reality” that Dorian avoids is that “sin is a thing that writes itself across a man’s face” (Wilde 143)—that there is an inherent connection between the visual and the spiritual, one in which Basil believes Dorian’s “bright, innocent face, and [his] marvellous untroubled youth” (Wilde 143) are indicative of his moral purity.

This concordance between material and spiritual is precisely what is restored at the end of the text, and it is here that the novel most clearly articulates a “non-digital” relationship to the projected self. The supernatural capacity through which Dorian

supersedes the moral constraints of his era is broken, and in doing so, the implied moral frame reinstates itself at the end of the text: to project a future perfect vision of the subject through its escape from the body is to exceed the bounds of the socio-material of a social context. In exceeding the constraints of the body's visual status as a text—in making it unreadable through and by the socio-discursive constraints of its context—Dorian Gray escapes traditional moral stricture. In fact, it is precisely his ability not to register “normally” that allows him to initially escape the justice James Vane wishes to met out (Wilde 182); by sight alone, he cannot be guilty.

After all, if the novel were to celebrate Dorian's aestheticist indulgence without any form of punishment, then the text would not simply have reached a point where it could be condemned as immoral or used as evidence against Wilde. It would not have been published. Whether or not the moral frame of the text is a meta-textual equivalent of the painting—the thing that allows ideas and the sensual to be explored “without” consequence—seems less important than the simple fact that it is necessary at all. To exceed the body and move into the realm of the impossible is to make bodies unreadable, and this must not be allowed. So when it is the imagination that tortures Dorian, of which “there was something terribly logical” (Wilde 191), another relationship between the projected quasi-aesthetic space and the subject is established, one that returns to a more traditional understanding of the beyond as the place that reinforces, rather than escapes, normative values.

At the end of the text, the question of interior and exterior and their relation to the moral structure of the text is made quite clear. Dorian feels it “was his duty to confess, to suffer public shame, and to make public atonement” (Wilde 212). It is only in a concordance between the subject and its social context that justice can be done, and “confession” involves speaking—of entering words into an ideological framework, likely so that they will be sublated into it. Yet as the painting of Dorian becomes the synecdoche for this relationship of inside and outside, in its “murder” a necessary relation is re-established, as the destruction of the aestheticized, projected portion of Dorian’s subjectivity results in the destruction of Dorian himself. Returning to Christopher Craft, the question of this restoration of order becomes one of articulation and discursive sublation, particularly as it concerns the question of reading Dorian’s body at the close of the text:

[The novel] closes on a somatic enigma.... They had not known [Dorian] at all, and so cannot recognize him now. Hence the sign the decides this scene is not Dorian’s brute presence as “withered” corpse, his being-there-dead waiting to be deciphered.... The last sign offered is a metonymy from which identity can only be inferred: in Narcissus’ case, the golden-throated flower; in Dorian’s a final shining artefact.... But “who it was” is now both path tense and past knowing. (123-124)

Dorian’s body once passed through the “normal rigours of sin” is unreadable, just as his living body was also silent or speechless: its capacity to signify in discursively established ways which were themselves indicative of a moral order was foreclosed by the

supernatural function of the painting. The technology of the image allowed for the techne for the self, and the horror that is Dorian's withered body is a sign left of the protagonist's movement above and beyond the normal "processes" of living and bodily significant.

Within *A Picture of Dorian Gray*, the aesthetic object of the painting exists concurrently with Dorian, accepting his offloaded moral crimes in order that his body can continue to circulate within discourse as signify as both normal and normative. His body becomes a blank text, marking out idealized, socially sanctioned expressions of both beauty and morality, indeed, making the classical conflation of the two. Yet, the moral frame of the text clamps down upon this supernatural threat to established "moral conventions of bodily signification" in order to re-assert social norms, particularly that of a concordance between the soul's signification within an assumed virtuo-moral sphere and the body as canvas for the moral inscription. And, crucially, the epistemological underpinning of this moral threat is that any phenomenal ground for an ongoing site of self-representation—some representationalist space through which the signs of the subject may operate independently of the body—operates through the function of material barriers: print publishing, fame, or any other connection between physical media and the construction through media of a persona. It is the very supra-material *supernatural* nature of the painting that upsets the established order, and is thus the thing that must be contained. No "safe" phenomenal ground for a site of non-bodily subjectivity exists for Dorian—or, for that matter, for Wilde.

Jas on the other hand is not a blank subject, similarly occupying the position of the canvas, adopting various obfuscatory visages in order to achieve his and the text's desire end. Instead, the novel builds Jas as a kind of virtual avatar himself, a thing to be constructed not only in relation to particular idealized representations, but also in the vocabulary of the digital virtual itself. Tasked with performing typical feats of adolescent athleticism, Jas wishes that "they invented some computer program that you could just upload into your brain," just like "*The Matrix*, where Keanu Reeves just plugs into that machine into a porthole in the base of his skull and learns kung fu" (Malkani 231). He is attempting to emulate a representation of his ideals through the process of the self-avatar relationship. Michael Mitchell suggests the invocation of *The Matrix* connotes the gnostic roots of that film's own approach in which "human beings ... carry within themselves splinters, or sparks, of the true, absent God" (339), and in doing so, the movie conjures the desire to connect material and immaterial, the body and imagination. At the same time, this virtual ideal, in which Jas is proudly "*uploading the program, the knowledge, the truth into my mind. So that I, Morpheus, can free the minds of others*" (Malkani 238, original italicization) is also the moment that the text explicitly engages white privilege and cross-cultural translation. It is here in his crucial conversation with Arun, after all, that Jas espouses liberal, Eurocentric ideals of individual freedom cast against familial responsibility. Jas, caught up in his own bravado, says: "Free your mind, Arun ... Join our struggle" (Malkani 238). The line presents a complex interplay of racial issues, but it also echoes the potentially Eurocentric ideals of "Mr. Ashwood's history class" (Malkani 239): let go of your backward ways and join the future. Interestingly,

though, “the truth” of *The Matrix* that is “too realistic” (244) for Arun’s Mum, is the frame through which Jas asserts his proselytizing. It is, as Robbie B.H. Goh argues in “Narrating ‘Dark’ India in *Londonstani* and *The White Tiger*: Sustaining Identity in the Diaspora,” a view which is “informed by a core of deep cynicism that precludes romantic optimism about Indian culture—but which also positions the tensions of race and class and honour in Indian culture as regressive” (333). When shortly thereafter Jas feels that he and Samira are mimicking the postmodern trend in film in which “you’ll see two people sitting in a restaurant or bar or cafe talking about films” (246), the layers of refraction between the subject and his various modes of identifying become even more layered. Jas is constantly flitting between images of existing “out there” and living up to them.

As such, if the trajectory of the novel is to move *through* a virtual space to arrive at a different material one, then interestingly Sanjay’s blackmail operates through projecting another virtual possibility: “I’m fulfilling your fantasies, Jas. I’m giving you photographic proof that you did everything you wanted to with Samira” (Malkani 301). The virtual at this point in the novel shifts to become a method through which Jas is entrapped rather than liberated from the politics of racialized bodies. Jas, however, is still operating in relation to the virtual: “If I go ahead with the plan, you in’t destroyin jackshit: you givin the photos to me, innit” (Malkani 303). At this point in the text, Jas still wishes to exist in relation to the various ideals the text has presented—in this case, a relationship with Samira. What becomes of note, then, is that throughout the text, Jas expresses “impossible” situations with nausea. But now that Sanjay presents him a point where he must act in relation to certain material facts—his loyalty to his father, his fear

of violence—he reacts by retching, but having almost nothing to vomit. The disparity between his bodily and virtual self, once sustained by Hardjit, Sanjay and Samira, is now seemingly broken, and as a result Jas’s body rejects all of it. The narrator imagines how he might describe his transition: “I mean, what the fuck would I say? Mama, Papa, I got something very important to tell you ... I, well, er, I, uhm, stammer, stammer, I just wanted to tell you that I don’t muthafucking stammer no more” (Malkani 318). In doing so, he also imagines they could all “have our own big drama, our own version a that big soap-opera showdown” (319). If Jas once operated in a kind of hall of mirrors, surrounded by the hyperreal, it is at this point in the text that he wants the walls of pretense—and thus his doubled identity—to shatter. “In real life,” says Jas, “you never get that proper Bollywood showdown, the one where your father stops sulkin an kicks some ass” (323). Yet, if the text invokes this “crash to reality,” it undoes—or perhaps concentrates—its own self-reflexivity. The Bollywood-style fire and revelation in the hospital, replete with a nurse who is “more like one a them porn stars or strippagrams” (333), is exactly the climactic revelation the narrator seems to mock. It is, quite clearly, where Jas says: “This is who I am, pleased to meet you” (334). He is presenting his “full” self to the “outside” (i.e. his parents) making his visceral, bodily reactions his avoidance has made especially notable through the text. In the bodily rejection—the nausea, the constant references to defecation—the text articulates the impossibility of Jas’s racial identity (201). And at its end, in partly casting off the *desi* rudeboy identity, Jas returns to another sort of order—but not completely.

Two key points must be made here about the significance of the final line of the text, “But Jazzy Jas Man can do better than fuckin Thank you. I shoot her a look an give it, – Shukriya” (342). First, its production of a hybrid identity signifies Jason’s white privilege; and secondly, it displays a remarkably different “restoration of normativity” than the narrative frame of *A Picture of Dorian Gray*, one that articulates the performance of a non-normative identity through technobiographic inscription as a mechanism of self-actualization. To the first point, one would be remiss to not make passing mention of the fact that Jas’s ability to *choose* which identity he takes on is itself a function of white privilege. Some critics, such as Mitchell, argue that the use of Shukriya signifies a kind of optimism around the resultant hybridity of Jas’s suggested future identity (339). That kind of view is espoused more explicitly—and more problematically—by Sarah Upstone in *British Asian Fiction: Twenty-First Century Voices*. In the conclusion, she suggests that *Londonstani*’s conclusion “play[s] ironically with notions of racial stereotype” (210), in opposition to someone like Kureishi whose work, according to Ranasinha, “often dismantles one caricature of Asian masculinity only to reproduce alternative generalizations” (301) in the production of a fetishized hybrid subject, such as Karim’s almost too-perfect meeting of cultures at the end of *Buddha of Suburbia*. Upstone, however, tends to celebrate the fiercely anti-authentic approach of *Londonstani*, perhaps too much. As she states:

Malkani therefore represents an environment in which ethnicity has ceased to be the primary marker of collective identity but, even more powerfully, has become something that can no longer be judged by behaviour. That we cannot detect that

Jas is white points to the intermixing of cultural practices amongst an urban youth generation to the extent that ideas of authenticity have faded entirely from view. He is the most extreme embodiment of David Hollinger's vision of a world in which ethnicity is not abandoned, but is chosen rather than ascribed. (211)

It is a perfect crystallization of the desire for a post-racial subject that is based upon a-referential performativity, rather than the overlapped signification of the body and subjectivity as ongoing performance. The problem is that Jas is *not* an embodiment at all, but a textual expression of a subject who effaces his own embodiment. It is not, in some simple sense, that the text asserts a Eurocentric viewpoint; rather, it assumes or implies a material fluidity to identity that is only available to bodies that are not always-already essentially linked to a racial-cultural subject position—which is to say the white body. It is perhaps a different argument about the text, but one worth mentioning because it clearly highlights that the text is playing with the idea of the post-racial self, in part by criss-crossing hierarchies of authenticity, but also suggesting both the possibility, but also the *desirability* of such.

The second point seems more subtle. At the end of the text, what one has is a white, British character who achieves an implied textual telos in finding a concordance between not only “two cultures,” but also a mid-point between differing cultural constructions of the relationship between the individual and the family. After all, Jas's “quest” ends with two revelations: of his white identity to the reader; and his *desi* identity to his parents. It posits as stable ground the act of revelation, of being seen or read in a

complete sense. This is, ostensibly, a conservative undercurrent in the text, but it is also one that marks its relation to “digital virtual epistemology,” rendering the notion of hiddenness or obfuscation as a thing to be done away with—an approach that will, for differing ends, be challenged considerably by both *Transmission* and *Open City*.

Yet to return to the modal functioning of the virtual expressed by Schwarz, it is here that *Londonstani*, a novel that makes almost no mention of the digital virtual *per se*, seems to mark out most clearly its capacity to be read through one idea of the holographic self. Primarily, such an approach relies on a reconceptualization of identity being predominantly located either “in” or “at” the body, instead thinking of it as a relation materially rooted at the body but in effect becoming a virtual amalgam of the body and its various representational instantiations scattered across time and space. From a literary standpoint, it maps onto identity the understanding of “a character” as a flow of performative signifiers that, importantly, are not located in or on the body but also insist upon phenomenal non-bodily fields of representation as grounds for identity. The post-racial self expressed here is one that is textually and narratively enabled by the effacement of the body in the exchange of signifiers. It is for this reason that the text can be said to overlap the epistemologies of texting and text-speak and the digital virtual: it is the desire for a subjectivity that is not linked the play of signifiers of the body, but of behaviour and action, that is expressed. Yet, further to this, in the novel’s predication upon textspeak—as it also conspicuously evades the internet or the World Wide Web²⁶—the novel also meta-textually expresses a desire for a field of self-presentation in which the necessary link between the visual signifiers of racial identity are obscured not just by

“a field of textuality,” but rather, a field for public social exchange that is both widely available and can also operate in a manner to obscure, obfuscate, and complicate identity in relation to a body.

It is a point and practice made more clearly in reference to the text at hand. In *Londonstani* the protagonist occupies a provisional subjectivity that depends upon techne of self-presentation and subjective enunciation in order to achieve the telos the text itself constructs. It does this through suspending Jas’s body and his virtualized, textual identity in a temporally and spatially simultaneous space of the literary imagination itself, constructing the trajectory of the *Bildungsroman* as a movement through a virtual identity in order to arrive at another, whether problematic or not, that carries traces of “both” “originary” elements. I argue that this evokes a kind of “digital epistemology” because, as Mark Poster puts it, the digital virtual does something to both the function and flow of signification:

Electronically mediated communication has compelling effects at this level of language. By distancing the relation of speaking body to listening body, by abstracting from the connection between the reader or writer and the palpable materiality of the printed or handwritten text, electronically mediated communication upsets the relation of the subject to the symbols it emits or receives and reconstitutes this relation in drastically new shapes. For the subject in electronically mediated communication, the object tends to become not the material world as represented in language but the flow of signifiers itself. In the

mode of information it becomes increasingly difficult, or even pointless, for the subject to distinguish a "real" existing "behind" the flow of signifiers, and as a consequence social life in part becomes a practice of positioning subjects to receive and interpret messages". (16)

The text's resolution is thus not only an inversion of a global immigrant teleology that beckons non-white migrants to adopt "Western" identities; it is also an expression of a doubled subjectivity which is partly enabled by the spatial, temporal and epistemological ground of the digital virtual as a persistent, non-bodily field of intersubjective exchange that, importantly, provides an additional site of reading subjectivity in a manner temporarily divorced from the specific constraints of a physical, material body. It is, to return to the argument at the beginning of the chapter, a textual phenomenon enabled by the widespread social fact of a hermeneutic field that privileges non-bodily signs. To wit, with no World Wide Web, the structural teleology of the text would have no phenomenal ground to support its epistemological predication. And even as the text invokes the logic of texting, it is the production of a persistent field for social exchange—namely, the externalization and formalization of a field of exchange for not just texts-as-SMS messages, but text as a material phenomenon presented on a screen and enabled by a network—that foregrounds a logic of the holographic self as a mechanism of manifesting desire or fantasy that underpins the text's eventual conclusion. Such logic, I would argue, could be both present in both texting and the World Wide Web, but is dependent upon the persistent public-facing construction of an avatar that operates in simultaneous (rather than asynchronous) relation to the body that, in terms of

"epistemology," is more in line with the logic and functioning of the web than texting. The novel's production of a strange hybridity expresses a desire for a notion of selfhood that exceeds positionality, but does so through an impossibility: the ultimate erasure of the body as signifying racial marker.

Consider, for example, that the revelatory scene of Jas's "true" (though perhaps in this case, and possibly all cases, that should be written as ~~true~~) racial identity occurs in the hospital at the point that he is filling out a form. It is precisely in being made legible and visible to structures of normative power that the text must do away with its construct that Jas is South Asian—or at least that he is "*desi*" in the terms that demand a one-to-one relation between a body and an ethno-cultural identity. There is, after all, no space on the form for, firstly, "proper name", and then subsequently, "the self as it wishes to be named." There is only the normative.

Eric Freedman expands upon the point in a section of *Transient Images* entitled, "I Network, Therefore I Am." Referring to the mixture of media on most social networking sites, Freedman argues that "within these systems of exchange, text and images provide participants with several ready-made possibilities for the ongoing objectification of their unfolding experiences" (155). His point is important, because it highlights the tension of the SNS, its capacity to enable a particular sort of agency, but to do so within both the limits and logic of a certain formal, and hence, economic and ideological structure. The very visibility of the images demands adherence to, at the very least, the logic of normativity, even when one is resisting it. Thus when Freedman advises that "in the same

way sign systems organize the world for us and perform an integrative function, we must also consider the manner in which we use sign systems in dramaturgically prudent ways to selectively present ourselves to the world” (155), he not only highlights this ambivalence, but injects into that discourse the historically novel phenomena that such non-bodily self-presentation is radically more widely available than it once was through books, photography or other physical forms of media. That capacity lends itself to certain socio-economic practices, and can thus engage in what Freedman argues is a kind of co-optation of desire in which “the social network can plug itself in all too readily to meet the anxieties that surround the human condition” (156). At the same time, if “the pleasures of the network mask the pains of alienated labour capital” (Freedman 156), then they also have resulted in the situation in which “we have, over the past few decades, become sophisticated archivists, and are now rather adept at playing with the processes of signification that might situate and individuate us” (Freedman 156). Put another way, in digitality, “each expressive act exceeds its object status to become an index of subjective meanings” (Freedman 156). Each act of self-objectification is also simultaneously an act of becoming-subject in a manner that foregrounds a sign system of creation and a hermeneutic frame of response. What differs between *A Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Londonstani* is the extent to which that subjective index of objectified-aspects-of-self is allowed to function as a kind of corollary or companion to bodily subjectivity. In *Dorian Gray* it is a threat to unitary selfhood, while in *Londonstani*, it is mechanism of spatio-temporality expanding the nodes of a network, the virtual amalgam of which might be called “subjectivity.” The former is one form of the virtual self, the latter more

specifically one form of the holographic self, and in the latter the desire for that multiplication is a desire for an exceeding of a singular racialized identity.

Yet, in addition to this, it is important to note that prior to the necessity of the revelation of Jas as Jason, the “work” done by the suspended hologram or avatar has already been accomplished, and it is not undone by the reveal. Rather, Jas/on’s finale is that of actualization, becoming the independent masculinised subject that the text “always meant him to be”—albeit through the textual conceit of his hybrid identity that the reader is only left to assume is “successful”, “acceptable”, or “allowed.” If, however, as Nusselder argues, that the avatar—or what I call the hologram, in order to bind it as part of a holographic self—“gives a unified form to tendencies otherwise experienced as discordant or disturbing” (91) that “comes to being only in... externalization” (91), then Jas/on’s avatar of a patriarchal *desi* identity is a figurative imagining of the unity of avatar and self that, “in reality,” could not only not occur, but is actively avoided by Jas as a threatening possibility until the pieces have fallen into place to make the virtual projection “actual.” Yet, at the same time, because “‘being in a virtual world’ is not some sort disembodied presence, as in the conception of cyberspace where ‘the mind leaves the body’ [but] instead... has a material, embodied foundation” (Nusselder 92-93), it means that Jas/on enters into an *affective* relationship with the avatar/hologram as much as a symbolic one, finding a “technological construction to the aspects of the imaginary and symbolic production of our (bodily) self” (Nusselder 93)—though, to this I should perhaps add that it is the *logic* of that technological construction rather than technology itself that underpins *Londonstani*. As such, the novel not only posits Jas/on as moving

toward an idealized version of self, but does so through a symbolic and affective relation to a pole of an ego-ideal, the effects of which linger even after the hologram of the ego-ideal dissipates and disappears through the (re)entrance into the narrative—and subsequent reconfiguration—of normative racial identity. If confidence is an emotion, and “Shukriya” is a Punjabi term uttered by a white male, then the end of the text produces the effects of what Nusselder calls an “affective avatar”: that in the creation of a suspended hologram in order to mediate desire, an impossible non-normative, non-reificatory hybridity itself becomes the aspirational pole that maintains the affective dimensions of the now-discarded hologram in the return to the body. It is a point that I believe gets at the heart of the why the digital virtual is not neatly a replication of prior virtual fields, for in its logic is the notion of the web or the digital social as not just a network of data, but a network of affect in which the subjective experience of self-representation is a form of “self-interpellation” which is mapped out in Jas/on’s textual trajectory. A post-positionality self may itself be an impossibility, and thus the production of Jas/on as an ostensibly post-racial self in which bodies de-link from ethno-cultural subject positions, is an expression for a desire of such enabled by white privilege but also the logic of the holographic self.

Thus one is left with two novels that are surprising mirrors. In each, the act of production of an aesthetically doubled self occurs prior to the text’s chronology, whether Basil finishing the painting or Jas taking on a *desi* identity. In both texts, there is a virtual space of becoming that is also a textual space of the aesthetic, whether the painting and its dialectical relationship to Dorian, or the meta-aesthetic space of the novel itself as a

mechanism through which Jas can produce a narrative of self-actualization through the occupation of a provisional, racially “impossible” identity. In each case, legibility and reading are central to an “aestheticized,” objectified representation of selfhood that is complicated by the multiplication of sites of representation, and the inherent nature of text as a “non-imagistic” medium sustains this fiction specifically in *Londonstani*.

I should note, however, that I invoke term “impossible” to suggest my final argument about these texts. In a very literal sense, Dorian’s painting is an impossibility. It is, as I have argued, a literary conceit to explore the ideal of aestheticism in a way that safely contains it within a narrative. In doing so, it engages a model of the self that implies a desired unity between technological projections and the bodily identity observed and engaged by other bodily subjects. The “impossibility” of Jas’s identity is perhaps more complex, however. To assert unequivocally that it is “impossible” is to reify blankly an essentialist identity in which a certain cultural expression belongs to a certain raced body. But *Londonstani*, I argue, does not do this, because it asserts the following assumption: Through the invocation of what I will call an “epistemological *techné*”—an assumption in knowledge of what one can do—it suggests that one can self-present in a manner that disturbs traditional interpretations of the racialized body, and do so in a manner that has, at the least, an affective or intensive relation to the body that persists even when the clamp of normative signification exerts its pressure. This is to say that in the construction of its narrative, Jas’s constant orientation in relation to ideals of both other subjects and popular culture produces a literary manifestation of a virtual space in which the potential signifiers of the self circulate in an economy of signification that

evokes but does not always necessarily attach itself to the body-as-text in the traditional understanding of the term. Through relying upon the “non-visual” nature of text (and doing so through the invocation of texting), the novel reaches out for a space within which identity could be “only text,” even as one might immediately posit this as an impossibility. This yearning for the impossible space is one form of the holographic self: a desire to find concrete ground for the projections of self through the emergence of one what might call a field of emergence itself. Digitality is an arena of generativity, but also of replication of social structure. The lack of the internet in *Londonstani*, and instead its reliance upon the aesthetics and syntax of texting, gestures toward the necessity of a “non-visual” or disembodied text-ual space in order to manifest any sort of post-racial subject—and by extension, textually maps out the impossibility of such through its own self-reflexive reliance on chirography as medium for its narrative conceit. This does not negate what such an argument means for the politics of racialized bodies or repressed sexual identities. Both narratives, however, disturb readings of the body through an epistemological object or process that exists “away” from the body. The object—and in the case of *Londonstani* I use the term object so as to foreground the dialectic of subject-object—circulates in a manner similar to Barthes’s almost unwitting invocation of the book as an object that operates in an objectival economy.²⁷ Yet, as Schwarz points out, the material effect of the virtual as “a second space” for the exchange of social relations has bodily effects, and at the end, it is this different effect of this other space—aesthetic in *Dorian Gray*, social in *Londonstani*—that differentiates the two texts. What

consequences this has for contemporary understandings of racial and body politics will be complex and contradictory, but I suggest they should be considered nonetheless.

In this chapter, my main focus was upon a dialectical relationship between a bodily subject and projected subject that primarily had consequence for the former half of the pair, if you will. But the production of this additional field for the exchange of signifiers of identity is also more generally a field for the exchange of social relations. It is persistent, in that markers of self can signify in the absence of the subject, making it somewhat akin to print. Yet, this capacity is multiply accessible by multiple subjects simultaneously, making it quite unlike print. It is like orality in that it produces a virtually suspended space for intersubjective exchange. Yet, it also explodes the centrifugal social and semiotic effect of orality and instead rapidly accelerates and makes fragmentary the mechanisms by which semantic communities are made.

As a result, what requires examination is literature which present the virtual not as a place of flight and return, or modal mechanism of obfuscation, but a production of a space or field in which narratives, ideas and selves function and resolve virtually. If in this chapter, both novels ended with analogous but differing returns from a virtual space to a bodily one, then what happens in literature, such as Hari Kunzru's *Transmission*, in which narrative resolution occurs in a meta-textual space "beyond," particularly as the text itself invokes virtual epistemology in various ways? As I've articulated in this chapter, the spatio-temporal dimensions of orality and print affect subject-constitution in

particular ways; the next chapter will look specifically at how the web and other virtual technologies factor into this process, and how they differently inflect the notion of the holographic self. But more generally, if the central guiding question of this chapter is how the production of a non-bodily field of exchange affects the intersubjective relations of the body—namely, how the holographic self as tactical deployment can upset the notion of the positioned identity—then the following chapter inverts the question: to what ideological and epistemological end does critical theory and literature invoke the virtual as a space of resolution, and what, rather than a potentially hybrid identity as marker of a longed-for impossible identity, does it express about a desire for a post-positionality self?; and how does this invocation change when the virtual is not solely a conceptual space of otherness or alterity, but instead has a material and phenomenological quality in the spread of digital technology like the internet?

CHAPTER TWO: STEPPING INTO THE MIRROR

The 2012 documentary *Herman's House* describes the plight of Herman Wallace, a member of the Angola Three, who was in solitary confinement in a Louisiana prison for over 40 years.²⁸ The titular house, however, is not the jail. Rather, in one manifestation, it is a project by artist Jackie Sumell that takes the form of a detailed model house, the design and arrangement of which Wallace narrated over the phone from behind bars. Its potential later form, which to this day remains an idea waiting to come to fruition, is a community centre for troubled youths in New Orleans' Ninth Ward, which uses Sumell's scale model as a blueprint.

It is an affecting, moving film, but also fascinating for a student of the virtual. For Wallace the house is a virtual escape, a space of fantasy into which to project an image of the imagined self and an idealized future. For Sumell, the model house is a metonymy of another kind of realization of desire: namely the creation of the community centre and the release of Wallace. Yet, there is also a virtual dimension to the film itself. As a viewer, one becomes invested in the transition of Herman's house from model to building, particularly because we hope Wallace may be released in time to see it. Yet, when the film closes with Sumell still working toward funding the community centre, we also exist in relation to the virtually suspended potential of the thing-to-come. There is a doubled, meta-virtual relation at work, both between the film's subjects and "Herman's House," and also between the film's viewers and a desire to see the film's implied telos eventually manifest.

The construction of a narrative in which subjects operate in relation to an imaginative field as a virtual space of possibility or potential is the focus of this chapter. What is perhaps different in the early 21st century is that virtuality takes on a semi-materiality in its digital form. This is to say that if “virtual” was always one way to discuss a thing in absentia—such as the house is to Wallace or, very loosely speaking, as the absolute condition of difference is to Deleuze—in the digital virtual, that thing/non-thing can take on an imagistic, textual and thus quasi-objectival form in digital technologies, a phenomenon I have dubbed the holographic. The difference is both as basic and crucial as that between Wallace sitting in a cell imagining his ideal home, and Wallace seeing it on a screen—or perhaps even “walking through it” virtually via a 3D digital simulation. Whatever arguments one might make about the digital virtual being prefigured by postmodernist and poststructuralist theories,²⁹ surely its uniqueness as a social-historical phenomenon must also be taken into account, paying attention to not only the interrelation between imagination and the digital virtual, but the digital virtual as an aspirational horizon, too. It is this relational structure, after all, that forms the basis of any notion of a holographic self.

In chapter one, the virtual was mostly identified as an alternate field used to “offload” or “outsource” some aspect of subjectivity to facilitate a particular sort of return to a body, whether for the purposes of philosophically “solidifying” subjectivity or obfuscating or recasting some bodily aspect of it. Specifically, in *Londonstani* the hologram of the holographic self is cast off at the text’s end in order to produce a textual gesture toward a form of hybridity that stands a figurative construction of a self-as-

wishes-to-be. That notion of escape and return, I argued, was symbolically encapsulated by the scene of Descartes sitting along in his stove-fired room, removing himself into a virtual disembodied space to return to his then “transcendentally affirmed” experience of selfhood. Chapter two seeks a differing defining metaphor: namely, the self stepping *into* the mirror. In Lacanian thought, the subject having emerged into the symbolic is embroiled in and defined by the split between the interiority of subjectivity and the objectival nature of the body in the “mirror,” a division that remains forever irreconcilable. Yet another aspect of this dynamic is that any gesture toward wholeness or similar fictions of unitary selfhood occurs in the imagination of the subject, manifested in the dynamic between conscious and unconscious desires. More specifically, as André Nusselder states in *Interface Fantasy: A Lacanian Cyborg Ontology*, the mirror stage’s “pivotal notion concerns the identification with the specular image as furnishing the self with a *virtual unity*” (84, my emphasis). The virtual is therefore not only a conduit; it is also always already a node in the ongoing process of self-presentation in which the subject, so to speak, constantly moves toward (or reacts against) an image of itself, and the virtual comes to occupy variously the position of both the symbolic and the imaginary, but also at certain times, the real, too. The figure of Herman Wallace was not just a policed body located in a cell in Louisiana; he also existed in relation to a piece of art, an idea of what that model may become, and the spacelessness of his own imagination. In effect, any time one speaks of a unitary self—or perhaps selves in general—one is already in the discourse of the virtual, because any concept of unity is always receding into an impossible-to-reach temporal and material future. It is arguably

this construction of a receding image that defines the constitutive nature of the mirror stage. What I am proposing in this chapter is that since, as I argued in the introduction, a relationship between the virtual and the physical has always been a mode of understanding for subjectivity, a dialectic between a potential future and a subject is also one fundamental aspect of the inertia of both linear literary narrative and the self-narrative by which subjects make sense of themselves—though the strictly “dialectical” nature of that movement may be something that needs to be questioned. In both cases, however, both subjects and texts assert an implied telos—a “fitting end,” a set of goals, an imagined “better identity”—and then orient either the subject or a text’s characters and plots in relation to that “virtual” end. There is the mirror, made liquid, and the subject stepping in—and perhaps being swallowed.

Another way to express this notion of virtuality, however, would be to suggest that the imagination, in the terms of the Symbolic, is an *interface* between the subject and the Real. An interface, after all, is both a surface or substance of mediation between two systems or fields, but also an internally interdependent system that renders one field accessible by another (though not necessarily equally in both directions). As Nusselder argues, “subjectivity of ‘the age of information’ is not a question of an autonomous, controlling (“phallic”) human subject at this side of the screen versus an impotent subjectivity that must hand over its power to an autonomous technological world at the other side of the screen. The subject at stake concerns the *interaction* of user and system, of human and technology, of real and virtual” (79, original emphasis). A digital interface is arguably thus *analogous* to language, or as Galloway argues, also analogous to ideology;

all three are sense-making or order-making mechanisms. Digital objects, for example, whether aesthetic representations, texts, avatars, or other forms, must be placed within the coherent world of an operating system, an online game, a website, etc., in order to be accessible and be able to be manipulated by the user. There is no *direct* access to code; there is only the interface, a point that, as I have mentioned, Massumi elucidates in great detail in his “The Superiority of the Analog,” and in which he argues that such revealing can be both closed or open to possibilities of difference or generativity (137-141).

The interface is thus a fitting metaphor to think about how self-representation operates as a mode of interacting with the ongoing movement of a subject into the future. Rather than the virtual alternate space being a conduit, a thing from which a bodily self emerges reconfigured, that other field can also always remain both here and not here, becoming an interface for understanding the slippage of the self into the next moment, as it does by its very absence from the present spatio-temporal moment. The virtual imagination is thus a site of either aspiration or disavowal of potential, but in both cases it is an ambivalent position of being both here and not here. This doubled structure of the virtual is my focus in this chapter, in which I argue, firstly, that the discursive and epistemological position of the digital virtual changes the material effects of the interface because of the digital virtual's capacity to operate as a supra-subjective field in a way that the always-already interior nature of the imagination cannot; and, secondly, that the hologram of the holographic self as the manifestation of the virtual imagination can not only, as in *Londonstani*, operate as a tactical deployment in order to arrive at a particular actualized identity; it can also call for a reconfigured self-projection that expresses a

Deleuzian sense of yet-to-be actualized potentiality, rather than a singular and specific possibility. This latter point is significant because it suggests that rather than only enabling a dialectical movement toward a synthesis of self—the self-actualization that results in a clearly defined “new self”—the holographic self may also be conceived of as a kind of scattering or dispersal of self in which a desire for selfhood that escapes positionality altogether may be, at least textually, expressed.

On the Virtual Put to Differing Ends

As such, the initial question for this chapter is this: what ideological and epistemological possibilities for a holographic self are at play when novels intimately concerned with an alternate virtual field express a desire to cross the barrier dividing the here from the there, the now from the future, and immerse the self into the holographic? To that end, I have chosen two examples of the *Bildungsroman* that, in the course of their protagonists’ trajectories, offer up compelling, but markedly different relationships with the virtuality of the imagination and the digital virtual in the form of the World Wide Web: Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and Hari Kunzru’s 2005 novel *Transmission*. Both novels express a particular view of subjectivity in the overlap of a linear plot and linear character development; however, they do so by invoking virtual fields that beckon their respective protagonists toward particular ends. Each novel’s resolution gestures toward both constraint by and liberation from specific socio-historical circumstances through a dialectical relation with the virtual.

Jane Eyre and *Transmission* differ from both *Londonstani* and *A Picture of Dorian Gray* in their invocation of virtuality. The latter two novels deployed the virtual as a method of obfuscation, complicating a singular, one-to-one reading of the body with the production of another virtual object—or, in the case of *Londonstani*, a textual process that, in its relation with the body, took on an objectival quality. The resolution of each novel, however, operates in the spheres the text themselves define as bodily. The key difference with Brontë's and Kunzru's texts is that in both of these novels the virtual functions as the aspirational pole that beckons the subject toward an implied *telos*—a desired end in the cultural-ideological terms of the narrative itself—in the constitution of the texts' protagonists. *Jane Eyre* structures a representative or referential relationship between the virtual and the material, such that the novel's virtual fields—whether supernatural, aesthetic or narratological—function so that Jane can arrive at a reconfigured materiality that accords with her subjectivity as constructed by the text (i.e. the inverse of *A Picture of Dorian Gray*, if not *Londonstani*, too). On the other hand, *Transmission* structures the virtual as a field of alterity that allows Arjun to actualize the novel's implied teleology “outside” the diegetic world initially presented by the novel, substituting the supplement of the hologram for a “whole” holographic self. In doing so, *Transmission* expresses a desire to exceed positionality in its narratological effacement of the body; on the other hand, *Jane Eyre* reconfigures the holographic to allow Jane to allow at an idealized resolution in the terms of the text.

The implication is not as clear-cut as saying the contrast shows a disparity in the possibilities afforded the subject *in general*; rather, each text expresses a difference in the

spaces of desire that are themselves constitutive imaginative elements of the material possibilities for a subject. This is to say that the immaterial has always had what Nusselder calls “reality effects,” but those effects differ given the shape, character and phenomenality within which those imaginative elements are experienced by a subject and grounded. As such, the two novels contrast the imaginative possibilities for their protagonists in a manner related to the virtual and holographic fields the texts invoke. In *Jane Eyre*, the structure of the text must twist a world around Jane so that she can be who and how she was meant to be, as expressed in the terms of the text itself. On the other hand, Arjun and Leela perform a double escape from the narrative of *Transmission*: they both leave the diegetic world of the text, but also the idea of the subject as an *identity*. In their case, the virtual sign supersedes the signified, but does so in a “virtual” way: they become dialectics of difference yet-to-be actualized (i.e. the Deleuzian Idea), rather than fixed identities (i.e. what Deleuze would say is the Kantian notion of identity). As such, in distinction to the holographic dimensions of self evoked by *Londonstani*, in which the ego-ideal is a reconstituted self that has “borrowed” something of its hologram to produce a desire for hybridity as a form of cultural capital, in *Transmission*, the holographic self evokes a desire to exceed the bodily “half” of the pairing, escaping the policing of the body and identity through a disappearance into virtual potentiality.

Jane Eyre is underpinned by the notion of possibility: i.e. a referential, causal relationship between the subject and its future expressions. As Gilbert and Gubar remark in “A Dialogue of Self and Soul: Plain Jane’s Progress” from their seminal *The Madwoman in the Attic*, the novel is permeated by “angry, *Angrian* fantasies of escape-into-wholeness”

(336), and that the novel is often seen as a “myth domesticated” (337) in its “mythologizing of Jane’s confrontation with masculine sexuality” (338). The novel is thus always hovering on the boundaries of escape and constraint, transgression and normativity. Meanwhile, due to its immersion in “digitally inflected” modes of subjectivity, *Transmission* expresses its resolution as potential, i.e. as the Deleuzian ideal of the virtual as the thing that exists prior to the object, the Idea, a dialectics of difference yet to actualize into a fixed identity. Rather than a comparative reading of “the historical material possibilities for agency,” however, I focus instead upon the textual gestures toward an alternate field for self-recognition and, as well, in so doing allow for illustrative comparison between the possible and the potential. Fundamentally, the contrast is itself indicative of a significant material, subjective consequence of the digital virtual, and thus by extension, expanding the notion of the holographic self to include an alternate model of its functioning as a kind of interface. In its tendency to operate as an additional node in the matrix of subject-constitution by and through its capacity to function as a extra-bodily field of exchange for embodied representations of subjectivity, the digital virtual expands the possibilities for identity and subjectivity in a manner that not only de-emphasizes the body, but also de-emphasizes the concomitant relations of power that constitute identity politics. This is not at all to position the digital virtual as a field of escape devoid of ideological or power relations, or even the body itself. Rather, Arjun’s eventual resolution is a phantasmatic gesture toward an escape-to-come that, in its very phantasmatic nature, operates on the assumption of such escape as an experiential possibility unavailable to Jane Eyre or, for that matter, *Jane Eyre*. Though it may seem

counterintuitive, the focus upon fantasies of escape makes my concern with both texts “structural,” inasmuch as my analysis relies on reading the novels’ linearity “with the grain,” so to speak. Their significance to this project is to be found in the “obviousness” of the progression of plot from start to finish, in large part because it is precisely the comparison of those movements and their predication upon what is possible for subjects that is the purpose of this chapter. Additionally, *Transmission* also functions as a kind of hinge for the holographic self, complicating the ideas analyzed in *Londonstani*. In *Transmission* the holographic self may also be an interface for conceiving of difference or alterity, thus expressing a desire for a “beyond to positionality” through locating the digital virtual and its various qualities as operating in a liminal space that is both “beyond” and not. Nonetheless, it is the imbrication of physical and digital, immanent and virtual, that enables the structure of movement-toward-fantasy in the novel—and it is precisely the unravelling of their interwovenness that grounds the text's reconfiguration of the holographic self.

Before moving ahead, however, a brief summary of each text is necessary so that significant elements of both plots may be foregrounded for their relevance. *Jane Eyre* is a movement through different physical spaces that accords with related changes in psychological space. Indeed, it is this relationship between an outer and an inner space that is the dominant spatial metaphor that underpins the entire text. At each significant shift in location, Jane is placed in relation to two forms of exteriority: a material outside and a metaphoric, “internal outside” that is her imagination or the gothic supernatural. From the red room and oh-so-symbolic windows at Gateshead, to the lure of that which

lay outside Lowood, to the spatial relations of inner and outer at Thornfield and its position as a site of flight and return, and to the manner in which Jane is both literally and figuratively outside and then inside at Moor House—all of these physical locations not only represent a linear progression toward an implied end, but also sites at which Jane is beckoned on to “the next phase” in relation to, or through disavowal of, possibilities of subjectivity that are (self-)presented in the virtual sphere. This linear movement expresses a great deal about how the novel frames what, at one point, the narrator contrasts as “the Possible” and “the Impossible” (418)—and indeed, rests upon shaping the narrative such that the material conditions of the text’s world change so that the Impossible becomes the Possible.

This structure I label as the “implied teleology of the novel.” In so much as any teleology is always already a mutually-dependent binary of structure and telos, this novel—and perhaps *the* novel—lays down a structure, which in this case is Jane’s conflicted desire for both normativity and proto-feminism, and then in some, often complex manner, the text either “delivers on” or “rejects” the implied movement toward an end. My focus here is what the specific character of the resolution’s “deliverance” reveals about the novels’ underlying assumptions of possibility for the self.

Transmission, too, is a linear movement through different physical spaces, but it is complicated by shifting the omniscient narrator back and forth from one character to another. In fact, this very “complication” is arguably the novel’s dialogism at work. Arjun’s story is initially a classic tale of South Asian immigration, in which he leaves India to find

a high-paying job in America's IT boom of the early 2000s. But constructed as someone who would fit somewhere on the autism spectrum, he is, even at the start of the text, already in a liminal space between code and materiality, between a thing-to-come and a present. He is also deeply invested in the public-virtual structure of fame, and is obsessed with Bollywood as a mode of understanding reality, and in particular with star Leela Zahir.

Arriving in America, however, he quickly discovers the all-too-typical inversion of the American Dream in which he is unemployed and seemingly unemployable. Unlike Jane, however, Arjun's relationship to the virtual sphere is one that allows to him to control and produce systems or objects that have material effects. When he finally lands the ideal job at a virus detection company—and then is promptly let go due to downsizing—the Leela virus (so named because it flashes the image of the dancing Leela Zahir) he creates out of desperation to save himself initiates cascading effects in the text's material world. His hope—his implied teleology—is “put into” the form of a Bollywood movie star who keeps morphing and changing in the virtual sphere. Thus the structure of the novel is intimately related to the unfixed nature of the subject. Indeed, Arjun's transformation from mild-mannered computer geek to “international terrorist” in the eyes of the public networks of discourse that constitute media is as significant as it is compelling. The hologram that Arjun creates—whether that is the virus itself, or his resultant public representation—is an interface between the self and self-to-come, but also a narrative mechanism for superseding Arjun's positioning as subject. In essence, Arjun becomes more hologram than holographic self, but does so because he has a

comparatively more agentic relationship to the virtual than Jane in *Jane Eyre*. Just as important, however, is that as Arjun slips into Mexico and out of range of a system of digital surveillance, he also “leaves the narrative.” In the epilogue, “Noise,” he is only described in absentia by a narrator who has taken on an altogether more reportorial tone.³⁰ At the end of the text, Arjun the body is gone, supplanted by Arjun the Idea and the Arjun (and truth)-to-come—a figure no longer legible to the systems of recognition that would constitute a provisional actualization into an identity.

This same inextricability of the bodily subject and public representation also intertwines with the life of Guy Swift, Leela Zahir, and also arguably Gabriela and Christine. Guy’s life as an “entrepreneur 2.0” is predicated upon the potential value of his company Tomorrow*, and each successive pitch sees Guy move closer to being swallowed by the fictional representation of success that belies the crumbling, baseless company he runs, a progressive failure accelerated and exacerbated by the Leela virus. His relationship with the conventionally attractive Gabriela, who is herself a site of conventional desire in the text in terms of her cultural capital and autonomy, is also predicated on the same production of a virtual masculine power; it too crumbles as Guy’s material fortunes do. Ironically, his final—and only successful—pitch is to land the marketing assignment for a new Europe-wide project to crack down on “illegal immigration” through surveillance and police action, a system that Guy eventually is entrapped by in a case of mistaken identity. Made to experience the brutal de-subjectification of the migrant worker, he also eventually abandons all technology for a return to a purist New-Ageism—the text’s complex counterbalance to the liberatory virtual discourse of Arjun’s path. As a site for

the insertion of representations of self into relations of power, the virtual field for Guy is one equally capable of surveillance and detrimental effects as it is a site for “escape” for Arjun. Leela Zahir, whose dancing digitized body is the imagistic form of the Leela virus, also exists in relation to a public self carefully cultivated by her mother that belies a private self deeply at odds with fame. The novel is thus intimately concerned with the holographic relation between the bodily self, the public virtual projection and the overlap—or interface—between the two. It is with this consistent binary structure of the two parallel, linear, interconnected paths of the bodily and the virtual in mind that I approach both of these novels—and I believe it is this binariness that *Transmission* ultimately explodes, significantly complicating the idea of the holographic self in the process.

All of this is to say that *Transmission* invokes a notion of a holographic structure of self—of a bodily subjectivity existing in simultaneous spatio-temporal relation to a extra-bodily projection—in a manner that manifests the desire for a unity with the specular self that exceeds the limitations of the policed body. Unlike in the previous chapter, however, the ultimate expression of such desire in this novel is not a reconfigured return of a mythical construction of the ego-ideal; it is instead a complication of the dialectical or binary structure of the notion of “subjective teleology” itself, suggesting that the holographic self as a concept in fact demands at least two approaches to its constitution.

Tugging at a Metaphorical Collar

In a project about the impact of the digital technologies on the literary representation of the subject, a canonical 19th-century text such as *Jane Eyre* may seem an odd choice. But few novels evince what one might call the “teleological inertia” of the *Bildungsroman* as clearly as *Jane Eyre*. Jane’s trajectory is not only extremely linear, but occurs in relation to material and ideological constraints the text itself lays down, such that the narrative not only deploys the gothic convention of “overcoming obstacles,” but does so in a series of ongoing dialectics between its protagonist and the socio-material world depicted in the text. It is precisely this focus upon possibility within the mimetic world of the text that makes *Jane Eyre* such an interesting expression of the relationship between the subject and its socio-ideological context, in no small part because of the use of art and the supernatural as an aspirational field that makes these two poles of possibility meet. If Jane’s and Arjun’s stories can each come to their “fitting end” through specific shifts in material circumstances, then the ways their depictions differ can, I would argue, reveal a great deal about how each text conceives of the notion of subjectivity differently.

Each novel begins with the notion of constraint. As *Jane Eyre* begins: “there was no possibility of taking a walk that day” (Brontë 7). The external world imposes limits and conditions. It seems a fitting way not only to enter the text, but also to frame a reading of *Jane Eyre* as it relates to the possibilities afforded a subject, and the relationship between the possibilities of self and the public (external) sphere. Jane then sits herself “into the

window-seat” (Brontë 7) with a book, in front an alternate view of two different sorts: the physical world outside and the world “contained” in books. Drawing the curtain around her in this cove, Jane is “shrined in double retirement” (Brontë 8), removed from her adopted family, and partly removed from the external. The notion of escape is one quickly linked with the imagination, the mere mention of “the solitary rocks and promontories” (Brontë 8) conjuring in Jane’s imagination a series of images in which “each picture told a story; mysterious often to [Jane’s] undeveloped understanding and imperfect feelings, yet ever profoundly interesting” (Brontë 9). When Jane is thus interrupted from her daydreaming by John Reed, he suggests she has “no business to take our books” (Brontë 10) and, furthermore, that Jane should “stand by the door, out of the way of the mirror and the windows” (Brontë 11). In being punished, Jane must be made to stand where she cannot see herself and she cannot see out—similar to when she is locked in the red room, and the interior space “within is claustrophobic, fiery, like ten-year old Jane’s own mind” (Gilbert and Gubar 339).

In this inside-outside structure, and in superseding the normal constraints expected of her—namely, to take John’s bullying as part of her station—Jane becomes, as she terms it, “besides myself; or rather *out of myself*” (Brontë 12, original emphasis). She is pushed and pushes herself past her position in life—an experience in which going out of herself “forces her deeply into herself” (Gilbert and Gubar 340) as she is also constrained. Thus, the temporary escape is quickly closed off, as the “reproach of [her] dependence” (Brontë 13) exacted by Bessie closes the material limitations of Jane’s life around her, just like the red room’s “two large windows, with their blinds always drawn” (Brontë 14). The

room's looking glass, too, made all look "colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality" (Brontë 14) as it "*repeated* the vacant majesty of the bed and room" (Brontë 14, my emphasis). To wit, Jane is placed in front of a virtual repetition of her immanent physical surroundings, one that functions so as to magnify emptiness, space and, consequently, possibility, the mirror becoming "a mysterious enclosure in which images of the self are trapped" (Gilbert and Gubar 341). Within this virtual space, Jane is but a "strange little figure" who "had the effect of the real spirit," as if she were "one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp" (Brontë 14). Presented with the virtual space for an alternate self-recognition, Jane disavows the reflection in the mirror; trapped in the red room, she is closed off from the exterior field, suddenly robbed of its potential to be a liberatory space or aspirational pole as it was just a few pages before.

It is perhaps unsurprising then that after the image of the self, Jane quite literally sees nothing—or rather, sees only formless representation of "light [that] gleamed on the wall" (Brontë 17). She is quiet, lest "any sign of violent grief might ... elicit from the gloom some haloed face" (Brontë 17), careful not to elicit a specific actualization of an almost limitless virtual. The formlessness of the supernatural terrifies Jane: "the beam was a herald of some coming vision from another world" (Brontë 17). The misrecognized reflection and the formless shaft of light can be seen in terms of possibility and potential respectively, the possibility disavowed and potential full of abject terror. Indeed, this nothing—this meeting with open-ended possibility of that which could actualized into anything—terrifies Jane most, so much so that its effect is "a species of fit" (Brontë 19) that causes her to become unconscious. In the face of a potential mirror, Jane must

commit the ultimate disavowal in that she retreats back into a space in which no recognition of any sort can occur.

This process of possibility and disavowal colour the text's approach to Jane's formation of self. Gilbert and Gubar argue that "Charlotte Brontë quite consciously intended the incident of the red-room to serve as a paradigm for the larger plot of her novel" (341). In the opening pages of the text, Jane exists in dialectical relation to a projected self and an alternate field. This space of otherness is always doubled, always both inside and outside and, in the red room at least, seemingly of this world and not. The mirror, the window, and the imagination all build a dichotomous relationship between a bodily Jane and possible alternatives or possible futures. The question, however, is what Jane chooses to see and why. What is the ideological investment in the tension between Jane's "liberty" and the novel's need to assert particular normative constraints?

The relationship to an alternate field is quite different for Arjun. For him, the relation with the virtual occupies a practical function. In opposition to his father's fears that he is "confusing his daydreams with reality," Arjun's "desires expressed themselves as images of a world that appreciated the principles of prediction and control" (Kunzru 13). This capacity to organize thought, beyond being highly meta-textual (in that fiction also performs this organizing function for experience and ideology), helps Arjun deal with the chaos of life: "Reality was Noida. The gap [between that and his imaginings] was too great" (Kunzru 13). Arjun is presented as someone who needs some way to overcome his

own personal and interpersonal limitations, and it is this grounding that elicits the virtual as a dialectical pole in the narrative's ongoing trajectory. What most clearly signals the importance of Arjun's need to exceed particular limitations, however, is the manner in which the text constructs his personality as being robotic or computer-like. Nervous before an interview, he tries to "reboot himself in a positive mode" (Kunzru 7). Thinking of Silicon Valley, the narrator uses video game language: "One up. Player Mehta, proceed" (Kunzru 22), and Arjun thinks of the spontaneity of face-to-face communication as if "it overrides someone's access controls and objectively lessens their functionality" (Kunzru 54).

The digitally-inflected language evokes Sherry Turkle's description of some of her subjects in *The Second Self* who, rather than being involved only in the production of another world, are instead "thinking of themselves in computational terms" (17), so that the subject is conceived of as a set of "information systems whose thought is carried in hardware" (17). Focusing on case study Deborah—an occasionally rebellious teenager who comes to find self-worth and focus through use of a digital drawing program—Turkle argues that Deborah "needed a world apart in which to build a new set of distinctions that she could then transfer to her way of thinking about herself and others" (*Second* 145). It is a space of self-actualization by proxy, a relation between a "world-like world" and "the world."

When *Transmission* introduces the then-unnamed Arjun, it does so in the following manner: "Round-shouldered, he stands for a moment and pokes a finger inside

the collar of his new polycotton shirt. It is too tight” (Kunzru 5). Weighed down by the world, he tugs at a temporarily necessary physical constraint that traps him, holds him in. Both Jane and Arjun, then, are introduced to readers through the notion of constraint, and especially in relation to another space that they employ differently. While for Jane, the virtual field represents a space of possibility of events that cannot happen and a possibility of self that cannot be, for Arjun, the imagination is a place through which to reorganize the material world—or, one might say, that it is an interface for reconstructing a relation between a desire and reality.

This is not to say, however, that the alternate field doesn’t have real effects for Jane. In her famous diatribe against Mrs. Reed, Jane feels as if she “had struggled out into some un hoped-for-liberty” (Brontë 37, my emphasis), and the repeat of the spatial construction of constraint and freedom seems to suggest that, for Jane, liberty is something always beyond, an outside and an after to a “now” that is “in here.” Similarly, at Lowood, Jane and her classmates get to exit the school and enter a garden, only to be “surrounded with walls so high as to exclude every glimpse of prospect” (Brontë 48). The outside continues to be a metaphorical space only accessible through the imagination and never one in which Jane can embody herself. When a girl at Lowood is punished publicly, it is as if the girl is “thinking of something beyond her punishment—beyond her situation; of something not round her nor before her” (Brontë 52). The imagination is constructed as a space of escape and flight that makes the untenable present bearable.

It is significant, particularly because Jane has up to that point in the text, resisted

representing herself in that space, the text instead using largely spatial diction to focus upon a relation of inside and outside. Although the text, in the particular instance of Brocklehurst at Lowood, frames that “external pressure” in a critique of the excesses of a Christian pastor, the novel in general grounds these demands of the outside as the frame of the text. From Mrs. Reed to Brocklehurst, to the constraints on the female body and normative social relations exhibited in her relationship with Rochester, what space is afforded Jane is very much a question of what space is afforded the Victorian female subject. The temporarily idyllic reprieve of the spring season at Lowood is characterized by the discovery of “a great pleasure, an enjoyment which the horizon only bounded, lay all outside the high and spiked-guarded walls of our garden” (Brontë 75). Thus, *Jane Eyre* is already intimately concerned with the notion of space, and furthermore, the relationship between the subject and imaginative space through which Jane and Helen work in dialectical relation in order to make their lives bearable and good. This notion of “bearing reality” seems key, as it points to the explicitly gendered politics of the text, as imaginative freedom is often a substitute or a proxy for material freedom.

Transmission also plays with this relationship between an imaginative space and the subject, but the manner in which it is framed is radically different, eschewing the notion of escape as a coping mechanism. Arjun’s success is in the (digital) virtual, both literally and figuratively, and even there he works by operating in liminal spaces. His sophisticated network of programs in the NOIT servers “formed an interstitial world, a discreet virtuality that could efficiently mask its existence” (Kunzru 27). Just as importantly, “it was a world that could look after itself for a while” (Kunzru 28), further

cementing the digital virtual as a persistent alternate space that represents an alternative version of “the world” itself. Arjun is a person who, according to friend and one-time romantic partner Christine, possessed “a hiddenness” as if “on some frequency of his life beyond the visible spectrum there was great excitement” (Kunzru 61). Constantly existing in the space between the legible and the secret, Arjun is never fully whole in the physical world, instead “fleeing into a place where communication was governed by clearly laid-out rules” (Kunzru 101), echoing Hayles’s notion of the phase of cybernetics in virtuality. It is not a final escape that Arjun seeks—at least, not in this part of the text. It is instead a liminal here-and-there-ness in which the “virtual dualism” of *Jane Eyre* does not come into play, and through which the binary structure of the holographic self suggests a continuous movement or flux between competing or complementary states or fields.

Fittingly, Arjun’s relationship with technology is one of a kind of “mutual understanding.” He suspects that “something inside the machine must be alive” and, moreover, that a “computer booting up is creating itself *ex nihilo*, each stage of activity generating the grounds for the next” (Kunzru 100). He turns to machines for creation and “particularly loved to run simulations,” so much so that “watching populations of computer creatures grow and die, he found himself meditating on scale, wondering in a teenage way if his own world were nothing but a stupendous piece of programming” (Kunzru 101). The virtual, to invoke my slightly odd phrasing from earlier, is “a place in which things happen.” As Phillip Leonard argues in “A ‘revolution in code’? Hari Kunzru’s *Transmission* and the Politics of Hacking,” technology in the novel “is seen to effect a redistribution of spatial co-ordinates, and in this regard Kunzru’s text endorses

Manuel Castells' claim that the information age has redefined, rather than renounced, the relationship between space and culture" (271). This is not to say, however, that the virtual is simply a place for Arjun to do what he cannot do otherwise. It is also a mimetic space in which to produce impossible versions of the self. In a telephone conversation with his sister, Preeti, the narrator notes that "she was so happy for him that he [Arjun] had even made up a few things to please her. Keanu Reeves in a Pizza Hut. An earth tremor. Miniature golf" (Kunzru 43). But faced with the prospect of having to go back to India, "he blamed the phone" which "made it too easy" (Kunzru 92) to produce an alternate vision of reality, to construct a fantastical reality in which Arjun "had solved a technical problem worrying Larry Ellison for years ... how he had sat next to David Hasselhoff at dinner" (Kunzru 93). The phone makes it easy to produce the doubly virtual America: America as the dream-like end goal of Arjun's implied teleology, and the America that would never let Arjun achieve that. Leonard suggests that "the USA appears to [Arjun] as the incarnation of the information age, where the free movement of data across physical space is literalized by the uninhibited passage of elite programmers across territorial frontiers" (273), mapping out a concordance between the alterity of virtual space and physical space. Yet, because alternate, virtual space in *Transmission* functions discursively as a "real field of experience," standing in for the real at those moments in which its status is rendered invisible or illegible to the perceiving subject, Arjun is afforded possibilities Jane is not and which cannot only be ascribed to the differences related to sex or social history.

As such, possibility and potential are key motivating factors in both texts. With her

material ground of recognition gone, Jane must contemplate life after Lowood. And it is at this moment that Jane is again set in front of a window, her eyes passing “all other objects to rest on those most remote, the blue peaks” of the “hilly horizon” (Brontë 85). The symbolism is obvious, on one level, but it also enacts spatially a teleological structure: dissatisfaction with the present, a desire for liberty that is quickly “scattered on the wind” and “swept off into vague space” (Brontë 85). Within her mind, Jane is literally tracing “a white road winding round the base of one mountain, and vanishing in a gorge between two” (Brontë 85). In this image of an ineffable push toward an unknown future liberty, then, it is perhaps unsurprising that Jane is interrupted. Indeed, just before this moment, her cry that she be granted “at least a new *servitude*” (Brontë 85, my emphasis) clearly articulates the way the text straddles a tension between Jane’s desires as a subject and the location and expression of those desires within particular constraints. This moment of comparison is crucial. Here, Jane is presented with a hybrid of nature and aesthetics that form a near-literal “horizon of possibility.” She responds to it through the sublimation of desire. By contrast, when leaving India, just as Aamir wonders “at all the out-of-reach-blondeness in the world” (Kunzru 28), at the first opportunity Arjun “washed the [*tilak*] paste from his forehead” (Kunzru 31), literally erasing the marking his mother has placed on him to move to a land of dreams. In a moment that is both gestural and literal, when Preeti demands yet implores Arjun to “come back a millionaire, Bro!” (Kunzru 31), the immigrant narrative and the teleological underpinnings the novel invokes become clear: Arjun is to transform himself from one identity to another, one mode of being to a new, better one, reborn.

The nature of that teleological trajectory is more sharply put into relief, however, by the “serendipitous” showing of *Naughty Naughty, Lovely Lovely* [N2L2] on the flight that carries Arjun to America. As Arjun articulates in reference to the film and its protagonist, “Dilip was *him*.... He was a dreamer. He had been idling his time away. If he wanted to live in reality, instead of his imagination, it was time for a change. How could he not see this movie as a parable?” (Kunzru 36, original emphasis). Constructed this way, America becomes the real toward which the heretofore “unreal” Arjun moves. N2L2 becomes an act of foreshadowing. When “Dilip discovers that a childhood of haggling in the Jalandhar market has given him an aptitude for finance, and in no time at all ... is vastly wealthy” (Kunzru 35), the text also foregrounds the idea that an in-built talent—in Arjun’s case, his capacity for “surreptitious” programming—will help him succeed over there. Just as with *Londonstani*, how the text then articulates this version of success, and when and where it exists, will become of some import to understanding how the text deploys ideas of the virtual, the holographic and identity. Just as importantly, though, unlike Jane, for Arjun this alternate sphere is also a space that he can “visit.” In one way, this possibility speaks to the simple disparity in both technology and subjective agency between a novel written in the 1840s and one written in the 2000s. Ashley Shelden, in “Cosmopolitan Love: The One and the World in Hari Kunzru’s *Transmission*,” argues that this collapsing in of dream and reality stems from the novel’s vision of a globalised world:

Transmission can be interpreted as presenting a globalized world that appears to be fusing into one whole. This vision of the world erases plurality and occludes difference in order to produce a single, global, transnational culture. This

“progress” toward the telos of universal community promises that the irreconcilability of national, ethnic, or political specificity will no longer hamper humanity. (357)

Such universal community echoes Upstone's reading of *Londonstani* in which the novel evokes a future world in which markers of racial or ethnic difference cease to have a determining quality. But the relation between an aspirational horizon and the protagonist in *Transmission* constructs the possibility of moving into an alternate space differently. When Arjun arrives in America, everything takes on a hyperreal quality: “soccer moms were more cosmological than human” (Kunzru 37), grocery stores are “sepulchral” (Kunzru 40), cars are “mythical chariots” (Kunzru 40), and RVs are like a “science-fiction mothership” (Kunzru 40). Though this fascination fades, however, “last to lose its aura was the TV, somehow more compelling than the world outside” (Kunzru 41), producing the public, non-bodily space of media—i.e. a field for the exchange of signs—as a space that supersedes a physical world in which Arjun “found it took nerve to move through crowds in which everyone was so tall and heavy, *so meaty*” (Kunzru 41, original emphasis). The gleaming physicality of America and Americans is intimidating; the world of electronic images, sounds and words is comforting.

A hierarchy of real and virtual break down in this set of dichotomies, which the novel continues to stress. In Scotland, the “medieval” castle of the film set is a product of a romantic 20th-century grandfather, into “sword in the stone and all that” who, the Laird says, produces a castle “far more picturesque than any of the real ones” (Kunzru 223); this

imagined version of the past and its monuments, according to the Laird, is “British heritage at its best” (Kunzru 223). Meanwhile, “in the European Union quarter of Brussels, like all areas devoted to government and administration, the physical has been ruthlessly subordinated to the immaterial” (Kunzru 233). When Guy arrives in Dubai, the narrator suggests that “here was the future, arriving at mouse-click velocity, CAD/CAM sketches cloaking themselves in concrete and steel before his eyes” (Kunzru 167), and the digital and the material become inextricably part and parcel of the same immanent, phenomenal field.

Each text thus articulates particular teleological trajectories for their protagonists and then delivers them. It is only in the construction of these fields of desire that the texts can express a linear force at all. Granted, this kind of “narrative beckoning” is arguably a key feature of narrative in general. But the specific ideological construction of that beckoning becomes important in understanding not only the difference between *Jane Eyre* and *Transmission*, but also these texts and *A Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Londonstani*—and by extension, the differing constructions of the holographic self in each of the contemporary texts.

A Horizon of Possibility

The arrival of Rochester is a distant sound coming toward Jane, “a rude noise” (Brontë 112) that, in its appearance, initiates a process of expectation and desire. More to the point, Jane’s expectation is deeply coloured by her own investments, and “all sorts of

fancies bright and dark tenanted” (Brontë 112) her mind with the promise of what is to come. Presented with Rochester’s “dark face, with stern features” (Brontë 113) and what seems her first encounter with sexual desire, Jane and readers are provided with a curious moment. In thinking of traditional ideals of such desire, the narrative voice suggests that she “should have known instinctively that they neither had nor could have sympathy with anything in me, and should have shunned them as one would fire, lightening, or anything else that is bright” (Brontë 113). It is the initial encounter with one expression of masculinity that produces a desire for the very same “version” of masculinity, as if the text produces the object of desire as if it were initial and originary, retrospectively, such that Jane can see Rochester as the materialization of her (sexual) desire *because* the “version” is as if mirrored “back” as (if) already there. The dynamic is not simply a felicity of happenstance phrasing. It is brief, but important, particularly when considering the interwoven dialectics of desire and constraint. For here again, we see glimmers of the supernatural at the edges of this novel, as Rochester thinks it is “no wonder [Jane has] rather the look of another world” (Brontë 121) after her time at Lowood. Just a bit later in the narrative, the relationship between the imagination and the corporeal is one clarified by Jane’s pictures. The narrator suggests she “saw them with the spiritual eyes, before [she] attempted to embody them” (Brontë 125). The diction is interesting: “the spiritual eye” rather than “my.” The passage invokes a temporal linearity to the act of the creation that seems evocative in light of the overarching narrative: first is the image in the mind, then the attempt to embody; then, later, a failure to actualize the imagined thing, leaving “but a pale portrait of the thing [Jane] had conceived” (Brontë 125).

The obvious symbolism of the paintings themselves, then—cold, solitary, dominated by faded figures, of a “colossal head, inclined toward the iceberg” or “two thin hands ... bloodless, white as a bone” (Brontë 125)—are fascinating ways for Brontë not only to add complexity to Jane, but also to evoke lonely yearning within her. If, as Rochester condescendingly asserts, they “have secured a shadow of [her] thought” (Brontë 126), then they are also themselves a certain shadow: an inarticulateness of image that expresses a female subject desiring things that, even in an act of creation, seem to recede into the distance, as if the diaphanous figures are possibilities Jane does not quite know how to express. They are, as Thomas A. Langford suggests in “Prophetic Imagination and the Unity of *Jane Eyre*,” a delineation of the phases of Jane’s life and, as such, are “prophetic, perfectly consistent with the atmosphere of dreams, visions and premonitions that characterize the novel as a whole” (228). Indeed, they invoke the structure of relationality between a subject and a horizon. And as Lawrence J. Starzyk argues in “The Gallery of Memory: The Pictorial in *Jane Eyre*,” “the pictorial elements in Brontë’s story must therefore not be regarded as yielding a set of discrete pictures, but as indicating an intellectual process by which the self-reflecting self attempts to make sense of a present continuously opening onto a future and as past” (8).

The text works hard to build a dynamic of a hovering image presented “in front” of the subject. When guests arrive to Thornfield, there is the projection of a scene, and the projection of the subject into that scene. Jane is seated before “crimson curtain [that] hung before the arch” (Brontë 170), which seems clearly evocative of a stage. Watching this play of manners unfold, then, it is in this moment that narrative clearly reveals that

Jane “must love [Rochester]” (Brontë 175), as Jane also attempts to forbid herself from thinking “of him in any other light than as a paymaster” (Brontë 175). As a result, the scene further foregrounds a tension between what is socially conventional and what Jane desires, made all the more important by the spatial arrangement at work: Jane looking on from outside a centre at what she wants, much like her time spent in front of windows. Indeed, as Charlotte Borie suggests, “as long as the source and the object of the gaze are not on either side of the curtain, a shrine cannot be a shrine. As long as Rochester and Jane are on either side of the curtain, the fullness of Jane’s identity is made impossible” (113).

The novel thus sets up this uniquely ambivalent normative/non-normative teleology in which “plain Jane” and “dangerous, secretive Rochester” seem “destined” to come together—until the text throws ideological-material barriers in the way of this particular telos. In “Charlotte Brontë’s ‘Tale Half-Told’: The Disruption of Narrative Structure in *Jane Eyre*,” Peter Allan Dale suggests that “Jane’s life, in short, is the story being constantly on the outside wanting in” (207) and as such, “the tension of exclusion demands the resolution of inclusion” (207). It is just such narrative tension that again foregrounds the novel’s structuring of desire. At news of the dissolution of her pending marriage, Jane’s “hopes were all dead” (Brontë 295). Rather than an immediate anger at Rochester, the reader is instead presented with a series of metaphors: “A Christmas frost at midsummer”; “ice glazed the ripe apples, drifts crushed the blowing roses”; “lanes which last night blushed full of flowers, to-day were pathless with untrodden snow” (Brontë 295). All of these images are of something abnormally or unusually frozen, as if a

winter storm has blown into a summer day and the expected end of a teleology has been upset, displaced; worse, the structure in the co-dependent structure-telos binary has been destabilised and reconfigured. The distinctly spatio-temporal framing here—"I looked on my cherished wishes, yesterday so blooming and glowing" (Brontë 295)—also seems to position Jane as now outside of the teleological structure, particularly since the love described is that "which [Rochester] had created" (Brontë 296) is almost akin to a kind of chemical reaction that has been started but now cannot end. After leaving Thornfield, "not a tie holds [Jane] to human society at this moment—not a charm or hope calls me where my fellow-creatures are" (Brontë 322). Jane is quite literally without place, and has no socially prescribed material ground on which to stand. She is not, à la *The Scarlet Letter*, a woman outcast because of circumventing patriarchal social convention. Instead she is "outcast" for adhering to both them. "Jane's own" sense of Christian propriety itself that comes to her from a maternal spirit that whispers: "My daughter! Flee temptation!" (Brontë 319).

Jane is not only fleeing the breakdown of her love, however, but the presence of Bertha Rochester too. Bertha is a sort of double, a wraith of what-might-have-been. Mrs. Rochester not only "represents Jane's urge to give in to passions, to rebel" (Jafari 47), but thus also comes to stand for the idea that "the protagonist is somehow internally divided and that this division is mirrored in the (external) double" (Jafari 47). As such, the proto-feminism of the novel is also simultaneously an expression of its colonialist context: in order for Jane to arrive at the meeting point of her independence and desire for Christian normativity, Rochester's transgression of British racial hierarchies must be "rectified." As

Susan Meyer notes, citing Spivak's remarks in "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," "the unquestioned ideology of imperialist axiomatics informatics' informs Brontë's narrative and enables the individualistic social progress of the character Jane" (96). In fact, Bertha enters Jane's space just as she is considering her future with Rochester, who has circumvented Jane's wishes and "cheated" her "into accepting something as costly" (Brontë 280) as a new wedding veil. It is at this point, just before the arrival of the virtual telos, that Bertha is not only described as "fearful and ghastly" (Brontë 283), but also wearing a "white and straight dress" (Brontë 283), as if to indicate the tension in the notion of purity. In fact, the fear and ghastliness are qualities Jane ascribes to the image she sees "quite distinctly in the dark oblong glass" (Brontë 283) of the mirror. Presented again with the virtual possibility of her double, Jane again loses consciousness, just as she did in the red room. In the first instance, Jane is unable to identify with her own image; here she is unable to identify the self-doubled other as such, and in both instances, retreats into a space of being unable to articulate anything at all, not least because it is the contravention of normativity of different kinds that has generated this encounter. Gilbert and Gubar argue that, in this moment "on a figurative and psychological level it seems suspiciously clear that the specter of Bertha is still another—indeed the most threatening—*avatar* of Jane" (359, my emphasis). Here is "Jane's truest and darkest double" (360 Gilbert and Gubar), the "ferocious self Jane has been trying to repress since her days at Gatehead" (360 Gilbert and Gubar) and the confrontation with another aspirational pole in the form of an avatar, Jane literally slips from consciousness into unconsciousness.

Thus, when Jane, through another of the text's *deus ex machina* moments, becomes wealthy, among her first thoughts is that "independence would be glorious" (Brontë 383). The trappings of wealth here are key, because they point to the freedoms of material liberty, the capacity to control one's own destiny free of dependence on patriarchal structures. Moreover, with news of wealth comes news of a family and another material ground in which Jane can root herself, "a glorious discovery to a lonely wretch" (Brontë 385). This Deleuzian/Bergsonian notion of possibility is a particularly common feature of narrative in that there is a representational, interdependent, causal connection between the construction of a character's desire and the manner in which the text chooses to then either "actualize" or "deny" that desire. To me, however, this is the crux of the notion that the text "twists around Jane" in order to arrive at an "acceptable" conclusion, one that has a causal relationship to the "possibilities" that the text itself lays out.

Of course, the ultimate expression of the text's bald use of *deus ex machina* is the death of Mrs. Rochester, a moment that has obviously been discussed extensively as well as thoroughly critiqued in the form of Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (though to say that novel is *only* a critique of *Jane Eyre* would do it a disservice). But Bertha Rochester's death is interesting for my project because it so clearly lays out all the socio-ideological obstacles that Jane must overcome in order to actualize the text's trajectory for her. Bertha is "dead as the stones on which her brains and blood were scattered" (Brontë 428), a subject now reduced to material rubble of no particular consequence. Even without getting into the obvious gendered and racial politics of the moment, the scene is significant because the

last impediment to the telos of the novel soaks into the (back)ground and disappears. Carol-Ann Farkas argues that in this moment, now “the boundaries of self – those that would confine, rather than those that lend definition without prescribing limits – has been overcome, the boundaries separating Jane from a true union with Rochester have dissipated” (66). But I argue that it is not merely a “true union,” but rather one in which socio-ideological limits on behaviour have been “aptly dealt with” so that this textual union can occur.

Bertha’s death, however, is not just a restoration of normativity. It is also the death of the double, the alternate possibility that Jane may have become. If Bertha represented a physical and figurative counterweight to both the force and sexuality of Rochester, she is neatly “done away with,” repressed, in what—to a certain reader, at any rate—is the most “ideal” way. The text’s, rather than Jane’s, disavowal of the alternate enables the actualization of the telos. The arrival at this point of the “acceptable” is one that also again occurs through the relationship between Jane and an alternate field. She is beckoned to Thornfield in the strange, very Gothic moment, when she is just about to agree (or submit) to St. John’s proposal. At this point, Jane refutes one material possibility for another through being beckoned by one of two indeterminate virtual spaces. Life with St. John is a temptation such that Jane might “rush down the torrent of his will into the gulf of his existence and lose [her] own” (Brontë 418). It is an event that Jane recalls “*through* the quiet medium of time” (Brontë 418, my emphasis) in which “Angels beckoned ... [with] death’s gates opening, shewing eternity beyond” (Brontë 418). In fact, Jane asks the virtual-supernatural to guide her— “shew me—Shew me the path’ I

entreated of Heaven” (Brontë 419)—as a means to counteract her “inward dimness of vision” (Brontë 419), cementing the sense of the virtual as the aspirational plane that guides the direction of Jane’s life. In “More True Than Real: Jane Eyre’s Mysterious Summons,” Ruth Bernard Yeazall adds that “the transformation of the outer world reflects a transformation in Jane herself” (129) and that the “mysterious summons” is about the concordance of inner and outer as a result of changed circumstances.

This is the strange ambivalence of the text. In weaving together the strands of the dictates of society and Jane’s fiercely independent desires, the novel carves out a proto-feminist space for Jane, itself a “virtual” construction in the space of narrative. The way in which the plot is structured—such that an poor orphan becomes wealthy and married in a manner perfectly suited to the text’s construction of Jane’s inclinations—also produces a space of fantasy of an unusually, materially rare resolution for a female protagonist in the mid-nineteenth century.

Jane Eyre is part of this project as comparative ground for thematic focus of this chapter on *Transmission* and the “field of alterity.” That field beckons and affects Jane, yet remains not only forever out of reach, but also fundamentally mysterious, unknown. The representations of otherness that Jane is presented with—the imp in the mirror, the horizon with no end, Bertha Rochester’s non-normative expressions of racial and sexual identity—are possibilities that do not accord with Deleuzian potential because they represent unknown actualizations of the matrices of the virtual: they are, in the structure-telos binary, “unacceptable” ends to the ideological ground of the “structure.” Jerome

Beaty in “Ideology and the Act of Reading” from *Misreading Jane Eyre*, astutely argues that the novel here functions through the manner in which “conflicts of convention or values ... enable a work to both operate within the literary and social conventions of its time and simultaneously call them into question, or at least hold them up for examination” (180).

In that narrative tension between St. John, Rochester, and Bertha, “there is a clear dialectical relationship between the phenomenology of reading and the ontological repertoire of the fictive world on one hand, and the ideology of the reader on the other” (Beaty 180). This is to say that the text skitters at the edge of particular ideological or moral conventions—the constraint of female sexuality, or the interrelationship of monogamy and marriage as a socio-religious structure—in relation with an assumed or implied telos that desires *both* Jane’s “satisfaction” and that such satisfaction should take place within certain moral constraints. As such, the function of that alternate field in the text is to lead Jane toward a resolution that, in its “neatness,” is a crystallization of the various socio-ideological concerns of the text, be they the proto-feminist characterization of Jane or the maintenance of nineteenth-century British Christian ideals of monogamy, propriety, or even love, for that matter. Importantly, the resolution of the text is both a function of social norms as well as the impossibility of other “acceptable” outcomes. To be plain, it is not as if Jane might found a company and then as a result of her independence meet a series of lovers at ports across the world. The alternate space of imagination functions as beacon in *Jane Eyre* because that is predominantly what the imagination is in the epistemology of the novel. If the imagination is “constrained” in this manner, that is not to say that *Jane Eyre* is a text that simply deploys the imagination as any text might,

invoking its ubiquitous and “universal” position for merely conventional effect. Jane’s imagining is always ambivalent. On the one hand, it is, in quite an ordinary way, an aspirational plane³¹ that beckons her on; on the other, it is also a site of disavowal, a rejection of becoming-other as those possibilities are foreclosed by the Christian, normatively-gendered framework of the text, as they are simultaneously and, in a manner inextricably linked to, Jane herself.

In terms of the analogy set up in the introduction, *Jane Eyre*’s invocation of the imagination is akin to the subjective relation to the field of speech in orality: its positioning is a function of its spatio-temporal phenomenality as always experienced “through” and “in” the constraints of subjectivity and its always-already interiority. The moments in which the imagination is externalized, such as in Jane’s paintings, not only express the mutually productive relationship between the imagination and ongoing subject-constitution, but also Jane’s inability to imagine herself into ideological space beyond that afforded to the white Victorian woman. That inability, and its manifestation in the *deus ex machina* ending, becomes reflective of the function of the virtual in the novel. It is a space within which the Deleuzian critique of representation becomes clear, because if and when the imagination is constructed as an ideologically referential space—or one in which a threatening space of alterity is foreclosed precisely because of the ideological grounding of the imagining subject—it has a tendency to reproduce those same ideological structures. Perhaps most importantly though, the ambivalent nature of the imagination in the text is reflective of the novel’s attempt to imagine proto-feminist space in a socio-historical context in which the material and social independence was

often foreclosed for women. The manner in which the imagination operates as both site of aspiration and foreclosure speaks to the inarticulable desire that aspires to a space that cannot exist. This is not to set up a contrast of the imagination, however, such that the digital virtual becomes a field within which all manner of difference-as-such suddenly becomes available and comprehensible to a magically “free” subject. Rather, it points to the spatio-temporal specificity the differences between the subjective imagination and the digital virtual as an imaginative field.

The imagination in *Jane Eyre* is an interface for the fantasizing of a materially and ideologically acceptable end. Instead of a neatly wrapped ending à la Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*, there is a complex (re)configuration of socio-material elements—Rochester’s blinding, Bertha’s death, Jane’s financial independence—by and through the doubled structure of beckoning and disavowal in the imagination. The ambivalent nature of Jane’s imaginings, and their subsequent “resolution” at the text’s end, is a function of the impossibility of embodying other subjective possibilities in an alternate, “other” space. Jane’s resolution must be material because the only “place subjectivity can go” is in a tri-partite structure of body-imagination-book, and in this sense, the material resolution of the novel can also be seen as a function of print culture. It is for this reason that the crux of the contrast with *Transmission* lies in a comparative reading of the novels’ ends, as it is there that the two texts gesture toward the experiential possibilities for the subject that are available in their respective techno-historic contexts.

The Man Who (Eventually) Wasn't There

To turn a more specific and thorough eye to *Transmission* is first to focus on the place of technology in the text. Most significant is the Leela virus, as it this character-phenomenon hybrid that I think defines the text's approach to something like "an epistemology of the digital." Leela's effects are described as "further blurring the borderline between life and not-life, the Internet had brought viruses into their own ... causing itching and discomfort to a public educated by science fiction and the Cold War to regard the convergence of machines and biology with uneasy reverence" (Kunzru 103). It is this blurring of a boundary that forms the ground of the difference between this novel and *Jane Eyre*, as the holographic nature of the digital allows it to exercise material effects in material economies of exchange. The material and the virtual world of technology are not separate in the text, but intimately intertwined at the systemic level. The same cannot be said of the field of alterity in *Jane Eyre*. At the same time, the Leela virus itself is consistently constructed as a thing that exceeds or escapes "normal" definitions ascribed to the material object. Leela is constructed as rhizomatic, always-already spatially, temporally and taxonomically multiple. It "was not one thing ... not even a set or a group or a family. She was a swarm, a horde" (Kunzru 107). Despite the singular pronoun used by the narrator, Leela is still always more than one, and "other Leelas, other things with her face" (Kunzru 107) were spread through various means, often occurring through "versions of her that broke completely with the past" (Kunzru 107). Significantly, this personified virus is also the multiplied version of the avatar and symbol: "So many Leelas. So many girls with the same face" (Kunzru 107).

Yet if Leela “could take on new forms at will, never staying stable long enough to be scanned and recognized” (107), then the virus is also a lure. Moreover, “the glory of all these variants ... lay in their power of metamorphosis” (Kunzru 107), their capacity to signify simultaneously as Leela but operate in a different manner. As Sheldon argues: “What is this if not a perfect illustration of how fantasy operates? The illusion of seamless coherence seduces us and, in doing so, diverts attention from the antagonism that fantasy attempts to allay” (368). As the virus morphs, it is recognizable by one set of code—signification or the idea that the subject or object has a fixed distinct identity—as it is simultaneously rendered illegible to virus detectors, “never staying stable for long enough to be scanned and recognized” (Kunzru 107). The virus, the digital object *par excellence*, is barely an object at all in the traditional sense of the term and only ever recognizable retroactively. If “each generation produced an entirely new Leela, her organs rearranged, mutated, hidden under a novel layer of encryption” (Kunzru 108), then it is only the signifiatory field that needs to recognize the phenomenological whole of “Leela” that forces the one end of the tripartite sign to remain stable. When the narrator suggests that there are “Leela variants that have never been conclusively linked to Arjun Mehta,” the text wonders if there “were other people out there dreaming of Leela Zahir” (Kunzru 147). Leela is both a thing and not, a synecdoche for a single node on a rhizomatic network, occupying an interesting mid-point between the Deleuzian “Idea” and the object. All the while, it highlights the notion of the holographic: that in its capacity to produce material effects, the digital object/Idea functions as material when it is not. The liminality of Leela’s status as an object is reflected in Leela’s functioning;

much like Arjun's own network on NOIT, she works by "inserting herself between legitimate instructions" (Kunzru 108). Given Arjun's own status as a visa worker in America, this fact seems significant in more ways than one, particularly since Leela makes it seem that "legitimate programs were doing legitimate things. Until they stopped. Until she took over" (Kunzru 108). It is difficult not to detect something like "the Empire codes back," hearkening to the seminal postcolonial studies text *The Empire Writes Back*.

Leela's liminality, however, also foregrounds two competing notions of the holographic. Arjun's relationship to both digital virtuality and his own public projection is, at least for most of the novel, of a mostly binary structure of desire, the digital operating as interfacing substance for a projection of the self-as-it-wishes to be. This projection as fantasy object can be "either an appearance in which the subject creatively represents the real, or an illusion or imaginary lure in which we disregard the element of subjectivation and fall into the trap of objectification: taking representation for real and ignoring desire's hide-and-seek universe" (Nusselder 101). Arjun seems to fall frequently into this latter problem, escaping into a projected future in which the predication of his own desire for overcoming is effaced. At the same time, the digital virtual is also constitutes a creative imagining for Arjun, a space in which he is able to make sense of the horror of the real. In each, however, Arjun's relation to holographic space remains a binary construction of subject and representative field in which virtual space operates as an aspirational horizon to furnish the unity of the unrepresentable and unachievable future and the present. Leela, on the other hand, sets up the text's first invocation of a

resistance of that model, instead invoking a relational structure to the holographic that is more akin to a swarm, or rhizome, than a two-pole dialectic.

What is significant to this project, however, is that Leela's in-between-ness is about the allowed and not, the material and the virtual, the singular object and the Idea, the "dialectics of difference" that are not dialectics at all. It is the same liminality that accompanies Leela's entrance into Guy Swift's life, as the infected email arrives after he "closed his eyes and drifted into a place of abstraction and warmth," the virus casting him from sleep "unpleasantly out into consciousness" (Kunzru 109). As the virus itself operates in the interstitial spaces of computing, it seems to affect materiality in a similar way. At the same time, if Leela's nomenclature connotes a kind of liminality, her functioning invokes a rhizomatic, kaleidoscopic epistemology. As the narrator puts it, "at the boundaries of any complex event, unity starts to break down. Recollections differ. Fact shades irretrievably into interpretation" (Kunzru 147). Evoking the same "extradiegetic" narrative voice that becomes so prominent at the end of the text, midway through the novel, what both Arjun and the Leela virus are responsible for "remains invisible to the counters and chroniclers whose function it is to announce what happened" (Kunzru 147). The Leela virus is something that cannot be pinned down to either materiality or effect, and she "was in the system like a quintessence, a breath" (Kunzru 147).

There is arguably an almost celebratory tone to this description of the Leela virus, a kind of Bakhtinian-Rabelaisian revelling in the carnivalesque upending of norms.³² Yet, to argue that the novel presents modern digital technology in an uncritical light would be

to mistake the ambivalence at its core. The unintended effects of Leela are framed as “the revenge of the uncontrollable world” and Arjun’s toying with a Pandora’s Box, rather than saving him, “had made [him] a nonperson” (Kunzru 148). The choice of words is interesting, to say the least, particularly in light of Guy Swift’s fate in which a digital system of surveillance renders him as an/other person and he is subsequently stripped of his rights and freedom. Furthermore, the “blanket electronic surveillance was a major selling point” (Kunzru 112) of Guy Swift’s residence, and the security desk’s “giant glass oval, reminiscent of an eye ... was intended to be reassuring” (Kunzru 112). But far from producing the desired effect, Guy Swift “tended to walk a little faster as he passed beneath the smoked-glass camera drones” and “closing [his front door] behind him was a guilty relief” (Kunzru 112). In the core of Guy’s life, in a residence called In Vitro, itself evoking the Petri dish, Guy feels surveilled and watched. At the top of the building, the residence’s *piece de resistance*, a “single two-story glass walled cube with a floating platform floor ... had yet to sell” (Kunzru 113), its openness too threatening, too public. This emphasis on surveillance is sharpened by Guy’s final pitch. Indeed, inasmuch as particular characters become evocative of certain ideological positions, Swift becomes the marker of the profoundly ambivalent effects of the digital virtual as a persistent field. Mid-meeting, Bocca speaks of a Eurozone in which “the question of the border is a question of information” (Kunzru 234) and that, in the face of those who “say they’re from a warzone but actually all they want is to take a job from a citizen” (Kunzru 235), surveillance is key to clamping down on the same liminality that Leela celebrates. The solution to these “invasions” is to “combine the database with biometrics,” all of which leads to “no more

lies” (Kunzru 236). Indeed, Guy pitches his vision of this newly fortified Europe as “Club Europa” in which the “prospective European ... should only try to get past our doormen if you’re wearing the right kind of clothes, so to speak” (Kunzru 239-40), the classed resonances of which are impossible to ignore.

The inversion of Guy’s fate offers the text’s critique of this distinctly post-Orwellian, techno-optimized vision of border security. But it also articulates the text’s increasing ambivalence toward the effects of a (digitally) virtualized subject. The issue, however, is in which epistemological field this faceless surveillance and liberation occurs (to invoke deliberately a false distinction). The critique of surveillance is material, in that it expresses the numerous ways in which the body can be policed. On the other hand, the narrative organization of the novel expresses a desire for a supra-material space in which such surveillance is escaped. This space does not exist as such, but operates as the expression of desire, and in that sense becomes highly meta-fictional: as the narrative expresses the ills of a techno-obsessed, surveillance-filled world, it also articulates a desire for the very virtuality in which Arjun can survive and live out his dreams. The fact that this space is the union for two highly naive, sheltered characters whom the world has tossed around makes this ambivalent contrast of the text’s aims even more poignant.

Yet, the text also works to foreground a contrast between this virtual sphere of both escape and surveillance with the bodily and material. In America, Arjun is aware of “the sublime mobility of those who travel without ever touching the ground. He has glimpsed what lies below, the other mobility, the forced motion of the shopping-cart

pushers, the collectors of cardboard boxes” (Kunzru 45). The capacity to move according to one’s own whims become important to Arjun. “What does a walking man dream of?” the narrator asks. “He dreams of powered motion,” when the car moves “down the road *under his control*” (Kunzru 48, original emphasis). Arjun experiences such a strong combination of “relief/fear/elation/melancholic recognition of past stasis” that “he found himself fighting back tears” (Kunzru 48). The capacity to direct one’s own movement in the overwhelming physicality of America is itself overwhelming. In much the same manner that Jane’s outrage at Mrs. Reed and Mr. Brocklehurst’s cruel acts sets in motion an implied trajectory of liberation, so too does Arjun’s powerlessness. If the first 45 pages of the text invoke the thing-to-come—the actualization of Arjun’s dreams—then what follows is, within the frame of the text, the realization of the dream. Virugenix itself is set amongst “sunlight glittering on the blue-green waters of Lake Sammamish,” “a place dedicated to the healthy alteration of work and play” (Kunzru 49). The narrative is not being coy here. The narrator notes that this is “for Arjun, an American life” that “had come, boxed and shrink-wrapped, thanks to the final interview, the one after which he knew he would snap” (Kunzru 49). Like a H/B/ollywood film, Arjun is not only saved at the last minute, but also ends up in the perfect job, his view from work, “hanging above the roofs like a dream of Kashmir” (Kunzru 49). The overlapped, ambivalent dream that existed in the virtual space of the imagination now becomes “real”—or, rather, becomes actual.

To return to the notion of texts’ implied teleologies, the promise of all of this fantastical success ending is “unacceptable.” Being given the usual corporate downsizing

speech, the narrator suggests, “it talked about reality” (Kunzru 90), and the sentence’s vague, impersonal subject is arguably more a reference to objective reality, rather than the manner in which corporate recruiter, Jenifer Johanssen, is depersonalized. Indeed, only then Arjun feels that “this was not his story. This was not his story because this was not how his story went. There had been a mistake” (Kunzru 90), a the situation that could be solved if he can “find the bug and deal with it” (Kunzru 92), which frames Arjun’s layoff in the terms of the digital interruption—or irruption—that he himself is about to initiate. Here, the text sets up a contrast between a thing called reality and the trajectory of Arjun’s journey. It seems no coincidence that in a manner similar to how Aamir wondered about “all the out of reach blonderness in the world” in Delhi, in Redmond, the blonde Jenifer Johanssen is described as “beautiful, really,” and one might well “imagine her participating in outdoor pursuits such as skiing or sailing catamarans,” all of which are described as the sort of “aspirational pursuits” (Kunzru 90) one might associate with travel brochures. Jennifer, the voice of a faceless capitalist bureaucracy, also happens to be its synecdochic representation. It is the perfectly landscaped world of Virugenix that in which “everything seemed precious and perfect” that is “the way things ought to be” (Kunzru 93). It also seems important to note at this point that the overlap of global capitalism and its connections of representation enables the virtual construction of America as it simultaneously also dehumanizes Arjun and robs him of his dream.

Crucially, then, when this world breaks down, both Arjun and the text itself turn to the logic of code and computers in order to “restore” order – to re-turn reality to that which it should be from the supra-subjective virtual space of the digital. The narrator

again interjects here, and it is unclear whether narrative voice is an omniscient construction or meant to speak to Arjun's mind:

When you write code you are in control. You construct a world from first principles, drawing up the axioms that govern it, setting in motion the engines of generation and decay. From this perspective the real world possesses the paradoxical quality of not feeling real enough. Surely, of all things, reality ought to be transparent, logical. You should be able to unscrew the fascia and view the circuitry inside. (Kunzru 97)

The passage evokes Doel and Clarke's notion of suppletion,³³ where the digital virtual is the perfect other that the real world is always denied. It is the virtual as always perfectly idealized phantasmatic space. On one level, the emphasis on order in this passage is an attempt to characterize Arjun's naïveté, presenting this brush with reality as an impetus to understand the "random, unpredictable nature of reality." But on another, order is one side of a dichotomy that the Leela virus disrupts. If the reality/virtual distinction is here constructed as one of dis/order, then the code-based disruption of Leela interrupts this neat separation, producing material chaos from an ambivalent sort of virtual action that is both order and disorder at once: the exact precision of code, and its chaotic effects. The virus is thus borne of the incompatibility between the way in which Arjun builds reality as virtual and the construction of reality according to more conventional narratives. For Arjun, reality is found in numbers, which "were the truth of the things ... in decimal. In binary, hexadecimal" (Kunzru 98). Faced with the shock both of losing his job and Chris

(whom he never “had”), “moving was not important [and] eating was not important” (Kunzru 98). The bodily is insignificant; “the important thing was to think” (Kunzru 98), to reject the material world and force a correction based on the alternate space of the virtual. The virus is therefore a creation of the limits of the bodily and the need to exceed them and the normative strictures for which the body stands.

Living in the Imagined Future

To pause for a moment here: what I term the “implied teleology” of the novel is a space of possibility (i.e., in causal relation with a prior referent) in which Arjun actualizes his desire. The virus is a rhizomatic, “post-subjective” digital production that provisionally, superficially offers the identity of “Leela.” It operates in a space that is holographic, which is to say that it produces material effects while effacing its own material predication, effects which are compounded by its capacity to operate in a manner that exceeds material constraints, most specifically that of Cartesian “identity” in which an object occupies a single spatio-temporal actualization. Furthermore, the relation here is one of discordance between Arjun’s virtual dream and his virtual solution. This all seems key to understanding the resolution of the text, and what remains to be seen is how Arjun thus exceeds this structure of ground, representation and (inevitable) possibility. Of particular import, then, is thus how this text expresses the location of identity. It is an idea that Mark Poster frames as such in *The Information Subject*:

If I can speak directly or by electronic mail to a friend in Paris while sitting in

California, if I can witness political and cultural events as they occur across the globe without leaving my home, if a database at a remote location contains my profile and informs government agencies which make decisions that affect my life without any knowledge on my part of these events, if I can shop in my home by using my TV or computer, then where am I and who am I? In these circumstances I cannot consider myself centered in my rational, autonomous subjectivity or bordered by a defined ego, but I am disrupted, subverted, and dispersed across social space. (Poster 17)

There has obviously never been a fully rational or autonomous self. Yet, it is precisely the *experiential mapping out* of that lack of rationality or centredness is significant to the experience of digitality. It is Poster's interrelation and overlap of the questions "where am I?" and "who am I?" that is most fruitful (and fascinating); for it is not just a bounded ego that is destabilized, but a bounded body which forms the bounds of the ego, too. This notion is pushed somewhat further and in a more theoretically satisfying way by Katherine Hayles in *The Posthuman Subject*. Engaging questions of both virtual reality—the technology in which a subject's senses are subsumed by a headset that inputs visual and aural data—Hayles suggests that locating the self not only upsets traditional understandings of the body in space, but also what one might call location as presence—of physicality and materiality as related to a positivist epistemological mode that is not only able to "find" the self but position it as "actually being there." As Hayles argues, when it comes to the digital virtual

[q]uestions about presence and absence do not yield much leverage in this situation, for the avatar both is and is not present, just as the user both is and is not inside the screen. Instead, the focus shifts to questions about pattern and randomness. What transformations govern the connections between user and avatar? What parameters control the construction of the screen world? What patterns can the user discover through interaction with the system? Where do these patterns fade into randomness? What stimuli cannot be encoded within the system and therefore exist only as extraneous noise? When and how does this noise coalesce into pattern?... In the face of such technologies, Stone proposes that we think of subjectivity as a multiple warranted by the body rather than contained within it. (Hayles 27)

If that is the case—that the digital posits subjectivity as inevitably based upon a body, but one in which its spatio-temporal multiplicity can be taken as “epistemologically prior”—then one must examine how a text represents the movements of a subject through space.

As such, when it all goes wrong, Arjun’s reaction of flight and movement seems especially interesting. His initial goal for escape is Canada, where “he imagined himself sitting at a table outside a log cabin” (Kunzru 182), the country becoming an idyllic and obviously false escape where the American legal system cannot reach him. But in his aim, Arjun fails hopelessly, having “gone the wrong way” (Kunzru 185), as he once again finds himself stymied by America’s physicality and the physical in general. When trying to elude capture, Arjun believes that if “it worked for Rajiv Rana” (Kunzru 197), then it will

work for him, creating yet another relationship between Arjun and a distant, out-of-reach public figure.

At the end of the text, just as Arjun is about to disappear from the narrative, he wishes for “a TV showing an easy-to-follow narrative fiction in which he was not the central character. Preferably with romance and songs. And a happy ending” (Kunzru 249). Here, as his life takes on a surreal quality, Arjun wishes for the manifestation of his relationship to public narratives was inverted. Just as importantly, Arjun’s public confession is given to the world at a cybercafe in which other young boys are also lost in the relationship to their temporary virtual projections. There are two types of games, the ones for entertainment, and Arjun’s, each in which an avatar is put into an economy of exchange in order to succeed within the frame of that virtualized world.

Transmission is thus a novel that articulates a cyborg, hybrid subjectivity for Arjun as a means of also expressing that “our selves are not separated across these two spheres as some dualistic ‘first’ and ‘second’ self, but are instead ... augmented [selves]” (Jurgenson) that simultaneously operates in both spheres at once. Furthermore, the novel grounds the trajectory of each of its characters in relation to another space. Both Leela and Guy Swift enter the narrative while literally floating above ground. Leela’s balloon ride is a chance for her to “break contact with earth” (Kunzru 11) and it is only high up in the air that she “felt it was safe to stop smiling,” to drop pretenses and to act according to her own desires (Kunzru 11). The scene, later celebrated in a party, has a theme of “floating on air” (Kunzru 46) and poignantly, “the lucky waiter who carried away [Leela’s]

empty glass wrapped it carefully in a cloth ... conscious of bringing home to his wife and children a treasure, a sliver of goodness to set against the evils of the world” (Kunzru 47). Leela’s entrance at a party leads some to a “momentary suspension of their cynicism,” as Leela has something “otherworldly about her, an unmannered, almost involuntary beauty” (Kunzru 46).

Guy Swift is also detached from the world while on a flight, the in-between space a passage so that he might bring “the message of himself from one point on the earth’s surface to another” (Kunzru 13). In addition to this liminal spatial field is the temporal liminality of the future. Guy feels the thing-to-come is “physically connected to him, as if through some unexplained mechanism futurity was feeding back into his body” (Kunzru 20), and particularly in the transitional space of the airport, “he would feel cocooned in... a present that seemed to be declaring its own provisionality, its status as non-destination space” (Kunzru 20). Like both Leela and Arjun, he also orients himself in relation to a possibility that is both ephemeral and “not here” and yet is also somehow constitutive of his being, much like the “intersecting value circles that he visualized as defining his life” (Kunzru 67). Such autonomy is framed in terms of the legible and the hidden, the true and false. Only Gabriela is privy to the world of his parents, “a house filled with ornamental china, heavy oak furniture” in which “Gilly and Edward seemed a little intimidated by their son” (Kunzru 124). For Gaby, “these solid homely things ... seemed to lie behind Guy’s confidence like a guarantee” (Kunzru 125). The invocation of classic British life being one half of what is arguably a “real/virtual” dichotomy is ironically invoked by the text such that Guy eventually abandons not only urbanity, but all of its

techno-capitalist trappings too. There is thus a tension in the representation of Guy, as his identity is bound up in representations of virtual things: wealth, stability, and security. Like both Jas and Dorian, Guy is a character for whom legibility is everything. After all, “for all its organizational innovation, ethos of openness and holistic approach to brand repositioning, Tomorrow* was somewhat short of actual clients” (Kunzru 118). Tomorrow* is a business built on the projection of things that “aren’t there,” as the text itself works to break down the boundaries between things that are and are not “here” and part of the world. Similarly, Guy himself is a production, a suburban boy become urban man, who appears in magazines as having “a ‘personal worth’ figure of 3.1 million, almost all of [which] was based on a valuation of Tomorrow*” (Kunzru 111).

Even Guy’s sense of his identity is bound up in the relationship between the circulation of public ideals and his own sense of self. In defining where he fits, Guy finds it “hard to specify who other than himself was included” (Kunzru 206) in a definition of the term “we.” What is substituted is a vague definition of those who “were the outcome of a process of natural selection,” those who knew “how to network, how to manipulate the flows on money and information to produce *results*” (Kunzru 207, original emphasis). Without saying so explicitly, the narrator is quite clearly linking Guy’s identity to class, but also a “class” of modern, transnational globalists who, through material and cultural privilege, experience an extraordinary and supranational life unattainable by most. Guy’s trajectory is clearly different from that of Jamal, his coke dealer, whom the text ironically describes as having “started out in life with fewer options than Guy when it came to demonstrating fitness for survival in global city” (Kunzru 207). Yet, if the text constructs

Guy as this virtual projection of wealth and confidence—arguably prescient considering the text’s publication a couple of years before the Lehman-inspired financial collapse—his *dénouement* in the text is one of the abandonment of both the trappings of wealth, but also its techno-derived sources. Initially, in his desperate attempt to save his situation, Guy switches to MTV to discover the “display of economic confidence” (Kunzru 208) that would change Gabriela’s mind, returning to the public circulation of material desire to solve his interpersonal crisis. Similarly, the attempt to reinvigorate Tomorrow* will work through “creatively visualising [its] hopes and dreams” (Kunzru 212) and, like Guy, doing so means to project a vision and have it manifest itself. When the text feints and gives Guy one last hope, it does so in part because the promising client “is very big on presentation issues” (Kunzru 215).

The relationship between the body and projection is somewhat differently constructed when it comes to Leela Zahir. When Mrs. Zahir first learns of Leela’s image appearing through the Leela virus, the reaction, “to be stolen like this” (Kunzru 132), presents a synecdochic relationship between Leela and the sign that stands for Leela in the public sphere. There is incredulity that “Ms. Zahir and her backers were in no way connected to the dissemination of her image around the globe” (Kunzru 188), it being seemingly impossible that the avatar could function without the knowledge of the body. Yet, it is this exact same process that seems to give the Leela virus its power—the very impossibility of recognition, detection, its capacity to operate as a referent that escapes the sound value of its sign, operating “internally” in a manner that is not dialectical at all. As such, the text is constantly ricocheting back and forth between the subject and the

synecdochic public projection of the subject in virtual spheres of the digital virtual, the media and public space. The bodily subject is often superseded by its signs. More to the point, each major character's trajectory and identity is interlinked with the manner in which the combined effect of bodily subject and avatar is read and mis-read by others. For this reason, the text's coda, "Noise," becomes so important.

A Coda of Code

Though short, the text's epilogue, "Noise," is in many ways a crystallization of the text's approach to the relationship between the subject and the virtual, in both its more philosophical and technological forms. In fact, I would argue that "Noise" not only neatly summarizes the concerns of the text; it also acts as a transition point in this project to shift the notion of the holographic itself toward a more swarm-like arrangement of self. The section's emphasis upon the provisionality of knowledge and knowability—the way in which "certainty backslides into probability"—results in the conclusion that "information transmission... is about doing the best you can" (Kunzru 253). It is a piecing together, just as the coda itself is a piecing-together of the resolution of Arjun's trajectory. The insistence on knowledge is framed in the difference between a particular understanding of technology. On one hand, we get "network administrators yearning for perfection" (Kunzru 254), envisioning technology as a regulated, ordered system that exists in opposition to the organic. On the other, we get the idea of Grayday, which the narrator suggests "captures a certain cybernetic gloom" that stemmed from technology

being suddenly prone to “appalling losses, drop-outs, crashes and absences of every kind” (Kunzru 254). The binary nature of Enlightenment notions of knowledge and rhizomatics is contrasted. When “Leela’s noise passed effortlessly out of the network into the world of things ... objects got lost” (Kunzru 254). Indeed, the entire passage suggests that the networks of digital exchange and economies of finance, signification and identity are inextricably linked. When “money tends to virtuality” (Kunzru 254), Leela’s effect is that “a certain amount of money *simply ceased to exist*” (Kunzru 254, original emphasis). This ambivalent construction of technology is not coincidental. The text constantly enacts a simultaneously doubled view of technology as the thing that lets Arjun operate in a supra-subjective manner, exceeding his “normal” limits, but also enables surveillance and desubjectification, as the text displays with Guy’s incarceration.

In describing the nature of the digital as a field, I suggested it was supra-subjective because of its capacity to operate as a space in which representations of the subject engage in relations of exchange in the absence of their author. All three major characters undergo this new relationship to projections of themselves. Arjun becomes a larger-than-life cult figure; Guy’s wealth and abandonment of materiality occur as a result of how he is read and misread by systems of machines; and Leela is a bodily subject, a persona produced by fame, and an amorphous, spatio-temporally multiple virus. In each case, the bodily subject is “exceeded,” controlled, or somehow replaced by the virtual projection. Perhaps more importantly, however, the hologram of the holographic pairing comes to supersede in a manner that in some cases reconfigures the bodily self, but in others replaces it all together. The singular bodily identity is exploded, and in its stead is a “pre-

bodily” idea, as an effect prior to an identity.

It is a notion that is arguably indicative of some sort of epistemological shift, something Mark Poster refers to as the “Mode of Information,” which suggests that if “history may be periodized by variations in the structure of symbolic exchange,” then “the current culture gives a certain fetishistic importance to ‘information’” (Poster 6). Part of this change has to do with the capacity to extract value from the exchange of surplus information in social media, an argument that has been taken up by theorists thinking through “accelerationism,” or the way in which ecology and media have worked to foreclose certain traditional Marxist approaches of resistance.³⁴ But just as importantly are the ramifications for a mode that prioritizes information is the manner in which the body as signifier changes—that, as Poster argues, “in electronically mediated communication, subjects now float, suspended between points of objectivity, being constituted and reconstituted in different configurations in relation to the discursive arrangement of the occasion” (Poster 13). The key here is not that this particular discourse is new. Rather, the phenomenal ground for such discourse is new:

In the mode of information the subject is no longer located in a point in absolute time/space, enjoying a physical, fixed vantage point from which rationally to calculate its options. Instead it is multiplied by databases, dispersed by computer messaging and conferencing, decontextualized and reidentified by TV ads, dissolved and materialized continuously in the electronic transmission of symbols. In the perspective of Deleuze and Guattari, we are being changed from ‘arborial’

beings, rooted in time and space, to 'rhizomic' nomads who daily wander at will (whose will remains a question) across the globe, and even beyond it through communications satellites, without necessarily moving our bodies at all. The body then is no longer an effective limit of the subject's position. (Poster 16-17)

Poster's suggestion that the subject can wander "at will" is stretched too far; it assumes the digital virtual as a space devoid of power or identity altogether, rather than a complicating field that reconfigures a network of relations amongst sites of subjectivity. Yet, this same phenomenon or quality means that the location of identity "beyond" the body is thus the reason that, in the text's epilogue, three bodies disappear from the narrative, and they also happen to be the text's three primary characters: Arjun, Leela and Guy. Even as the bodies disappear, though, their textual virtual "presences" remain in the text. In fact, given the ongoing insistence upon the ineffable nature of bodies and identities, this occurrence is more than a little significant, particularly because it is public space from which bodily subjectivity disappears, yet virtual representations linger. The hologram, in its liminal state, always gesturing toward a "prior" signifier of the body, yet standing in its place, comes to replace the bodily part of the holographic self in the text. The three characters' evaporation from the narrative is thus "not unique," however; it forms "part of a much larger pattern of virus-related disturbance" (Kunzru 256) in which the capacity of those seeking to weave coherent narratives and locate specific "objects" is stymied by the inability to pin down identity to the body or, phrased somewhat differently, subjectivity to a single spatio-temporal actualization. A metatextual reading is difficult to avoid here. In fact, one should not avoid it. All of "Noise" is inherently

metatextual, because the presence of the chapter in the novel itself represents a metatextual gesture. It constructs an extra-diegetic sphere in which the various fates of the characters play out. Rather than occurring “within” the narrative, the resolution is one narrated by an almost doubly-omniscient narrator, one who adopts a tone markedly different than the one that peered into the minds of Arjun, Leela, Guy and Gabriela.

Guy Swift’s metamorphosis is one of upheaval: “he wasn’t Guy anymore” (Kunzru 257). For the duration of the novel, Guy has existed in the liminal space between his own projection of the future, his projection of his identity and his material experience; yet here he almost emerges chrysalis-like into what he has always imagined: a new, different person, but one who has superseded the constraints of his life by abandoning them. Guy’s sudden change specifically represents an escape from technology, the “smoke rising from the chimney” of his cottage amidst “a bleak landscape that has changed very little in hundreds of years” (Kunzru 258), “a sign of human presence where none was expected” (Kunzru 258). As for Guy at this point, “it would be hard to imagine someone who looks less like a London media agency boss” (Kunzru 258). The talk of “geopathic energy” and “a total life change to get me well again” clearly indicates a return to something, an ineffable ideal characterized by earthenware pots, which though “lumpy and erratic ... have a certain charm” (Kunzru 259). To wit, “the new Guy Swift is a sincere man” (Kunzru 259), clearly different—and also, in his return to the bodily after a flight through virtual space, is redolent of Jas in *Londonstani*.

One might imagine, then, that the text is “doing away with all this virtual

nonsense.” Guy finds peace away from techno-capitalism. But it is only after the effect of the “transpositional worm” variant of Leela8 that Guy is pushed into another life, mistaken for “Gjergj Ruli, Albanian national” (Kunzru 259), the “shuffling effect” performing the ostensibly virtual effect of “allowing” Guy to experience life as somebody else for a time. Guy occupies the avatar of another identity and is changed for and by it. Indeed, the entire structure and function of this section of the novel articulates a profoundly ambivalent relationship to the virtual. In attempting to pin down the story of Arjun’s disappearance, “the volume of secondary material increases” and as a result “the true meaning of the Leela occlusions” becomes “more obscure” (Kunzru 265). The indeterminacy initiated by technology renders narrative resolution fuzzy, unclear. On the one hand, it is “simply” the usual presence of the overdetermined sign, the “dancing female figure” (Kunzru 266) on a pair of sunglasses that may signify a great deal or absolutely nothing.

The text begins by foregrounding Arjun’s relationship to a dream-like world of mass media and the public sphere, and it ends by inverting that relationship, with Arjun’s picture “pinned to the corkboard [of an admirer] ... next to Claude Shannon” (Kunzru 267), the “father of information theory.” Arjun becomes “a hero to a younger generation of disaffected hackers” and the “hagiographic tone of postings and ‘zine articles” (Kunzru 267) suggests that now Arjun is the aspirational figure of desire, inverting yet another of the text’s initial tropes. Arjun Mehta is now the Idea, the canvas onto which young idealists project their desires. But though Rajiv Rana and other Bollywood characters were relatively stable reference points for Arjun, the protagonist becomes a kind of fluid

symbol, with “Arjun” ending up authoring “statements on the food industry and the World Trade Organization” (Kunzru 267), becoming whomever his admirers or various political activists need him to be—or, rather, need “him” to be. “While his initial attack lacked the ideological coherence that it subsequently attracts,” writes Liam Connell in the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, “this very absence allows for its co-option by a range of political positions as he becomes the symbol for more fully articulated rejections of capitalism” (285). To wit, Arjun is an Idea, in the Deleuzian sense, “an n-dimensional, continuous, defined multiplicity” (Deleuze, *Difference* 182). More specifically, the Idea and the absent Arjun become the thing yet to be actualized. Referring to the Idea, Deleuze says the following:

The elements of the multiplicity must have neither sensible form nor conceptual signification, nor, therefore, any assignable function. They are not even actually existent, but inseparable from a potential or a virtuality. In this sense they imply no prior identity, no positing of a something that could be called one or the same. On the contrary, their indetermination renders possible the manifestation of difference freed from all subordination. (*Difference* 183)

Arjun had a prior identity (located in interstitial spaces), but in the coda he refutes both identity and the finality and singularity that comes with the process of actualization. In becoming a malleable identity to be repurposed as he simultaneously escapes the immanent diegetic frame of the text, Arjun is a set of relations of difference, a potential, rather than an object with a fixed, recognizable nature. He has slipped into an alternate,

unknowable field that can only be gestured toward, but never pinned down with any certainty. There is undoubtedly then a great deal of irony in the novel's final line in which, in trying to gesture toward what has happened to Arjun and Leela, of the many conspiracy theories, "there is one possible explanation, only one pattern than makes sense" (Kunzru 276). Yet, as Sheldon argues, "it turns out to be the case—quite literally—that there is not 'only one'; there are actually two 'only ones.' 'One' itself becomes the insistence upon multiplicity. The many possible explanations do not so much contradict as inform and constitute the 'only one' with which Kunzru ends his novel" (364). There is, at the end of the text, not simply indeterminacy, but only multiplicity—an extension of the self beyond the singular into a self-less place in which the exceeding of self can only exist as gesture.

It is a profoundly different resolution from *Jane Eyre*, whose beckoning by the virtual field occurs so that she can arrive at an ideologically prescribed material end. The public self or avatar is a viable material and experiential category for Arjun in a way that potential/possibility of self is not for Jane. If Jane's dialectical relationship with the virtual is the locus that manifests a variety of material-ideological positions—to end up again in a material point in the text—then Arjun's absence from the narrative textually posits the virtual as a "viable" dimension of existence. This is to say that the phenomenality of the virtual as a persistent field, in its capacity for reality effects, enables the resolution of *Transmission* in a "practical" sense, but an epistemological one too. If in representation, the thing that cannot be represented is impossible, then in the virtual, it is at least influential. Whilst Jane cannot actualize a reality until material limits have changed,

Arjun can do so in some other space, and even in the current space, in relation to the projection of his image out there.

The coda of the novel therefore produces the virtual as a space of alterity, but one that is still governed by rules of the material. Or, rather, it is both simultaneously: a field that in certain instances reflects its material corollary, but at other times abandons either its rules or its perceived coherence. “How is it possible, in a world of electronic trails, log files, biometrics and physical traces of every kind to slip so completely away?” (Kunzru 270), the text asks. But in presenting the mystery, the text also then produces a space of the unknown, the field of resolution for which—absolute knowledge, omniscience—constantly falls away and recedes from the reader. The virtual here is a space of indeterminacy, of the unfinished. If the narrative has a complex relationship to virtuality, then the narrative itself also invokes a virtual-like space within its narrative trajectory for Arjun to escape both material punishment and a web of techno-surveillance in order to arrive at a resolution that within the confines of the ordinary world “shouldn’t be possible.” Not to put too fine a point on it, but in this novel, the protagonist is a young man who arrives in a new country, gets a dream job, is the cause of a global, historical event and who then, the text seems to imply, runs away with the movie star he once idolized. To dismiss Kunzru’s choice of this idealistic ending as lazy writing would be a mistake, however; rather, it is akin to Brontë’s twists of *deus ex machina*. Arjun’s resolution in which his body disappears from the text is one that, if you will excuse the pun, “actualizes” the implications of the text’s ideology of technology. The text ends with that simple idea: “According to conspiracy theorists”—i.e. the most unreliable of all

interlocutors—“there is only one thing that makes sense” (Kunzru 274). So the reader is left to offer up his or her own desire as to the state of an unknowable resolution that occurs in a space of the imagination. What the virtual is to the material, the space of this novel’s narrative resolution is to the narrative itself—and further, that holographic self tilts over and slips into the field of the holographic.

What then is the reader to make of this effacement of not simply “a body,” but also the related idea of identity as singular? Firstly, it seems that Arjun’s resolution is a textual gesture toward something that is *not* positionality. Arjun the Idea is a kind of non-subject position, subjecthood as a potentiality rather than the subject as the always-coupled binary of being both “subject of” and “subject to.” The holographic self once again expresses a desire for a post-positionality self that is both illegible to systems of power and surveillance—which, intriguingly, are themselves enabled by digital technology—but also illegible as subject, in the normative understanding of the term. As idealized structure, Arjun is thus a manifestation of the text’s implied telos of actualization, but in such a manner to refuse “a new self” in favour of a selfhood hovering on the edges of legibility or recognition. In one sense, the holographic self maintains a binary structure between a positioned bodily identity and a hologram that exceeds such positioning. At the same time, the holographic self as dialectical model is complicated such that the hologram not only represents phantasmatic desire, but an undercutting of the very binary relation altogether—instead reconfiguring the hologram as a multiple-first set of relations from which one subtracts possibilities from potentiality. If the structure of the holographic self as a concept is about a relation between a body and a, or many, digital

self-representations, *Transmission* forgoes that relationality in a gesture toward the hologram as a space of idealization—literally manifesting the immaterial as the site of desire, an expressive exceeding or superseding of the limits of positionality. In doing so, the yearning for a post-positional self is constructed as material impossibility, understood as it is in negation rather than circumlocuted relation to a Deleuzian sense of the virtual or Lacanian sense of the real. And as the internet as an idea and as a field runs through the entirety of the text, what is clear is that *Transmission* operates on a model of the subject in which the body is, to return to Katherine Hayles's notion of virtuality, not only interpenetrated by systems of informatics, but in which the text also forgoes the body entirely for those relations of potentiality. In one sense, then, the novel digitizes potentiality—which is something different from saying it manifests or concretizes it: it produces potentiality as an affective and material possibility, in all the contradiction such phrasing implies.

Here, then, are two novels within which a character engages in a relationship between the material and an alternate phenomenal field that escapes the ordinary constraints of the material as laid down by the text itself. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane's relationship to that field is about the unknown and is also more generally unknown, as the supernatural element is a textual manifestation of the text's own *deus ex machina* design. The novel sets up Jane's character in a manner such that an ideologically sympathetic reader is asked to desire a particular end for her. It then also constructs a parallel virtual field of desire—one "in the text," the other in the virtual space between text and reader—which operates in supersession of the material-ideological constraints of the diegetic

world of the text. This field, rather than a passage or conduit, is an aspirational plane, particularly and importantly when it takes on an aesthetic form in painting and related outlets. In relation to this space and through the machinations in which Jane becomes wealthy, discovers family, and Mrs. Rochester dies, Jane actualizes the desire as it is framed by the text for mutual love that maintains Jane's independence and Christian, Victorian ideals so that Jane arrives at a specific, materially-grounded resolution that exists as both "acceptable" within the frame of the text, and also in the socio-historical context of the novel as a cultural artefact. It is ultimately an expression of a causal relationship between a material reality and a possibility, an object and its reconfiguration according to the very ideological structures of its own existence, and in the trajectory of the narrative is an expression of the constraint of that causal chain.

Transmission's approach to this same alternate field is not a causal, linear one, but rather one of potential instead of possibility. Arjun is constantly presented as existing in an unfixed liminal state between materiality and digitality, so much so that the digital is the primary lens through which Arjun apprehends and gives shape to materiality. However, in the Leela virus and Arjun's eventual resolution that occurs outside the diegetic frame of the text, and is presented in uncertain, "unfinished" terms, *Transmission* produces the holographic virtual as a field of difference within which the subject's identity constantly recedes into an unfinished, "un-actualized" future, refusing the "positioned" notion of subject position. In doing so, the concept of a holographic self as interface for manifesting fantasy expands to become, instead, a relation between potentialities in which the "unfinished" nature of becoming is narratively expressed in the

movement between sites of subjective instantiation. Crucially, the text foregrounds a difference in which this receding of actualization—which, after all, is a feature of all “readings of the subject”—is afforded a space for an ongoing unfixedness in the digital virtual within which Identity is supplanted by Ideas. If in *Londonstani* the epistemological possibility of the digital virtual enabled a logic of relational exchange with an alternate field of semiotics, then in *Transmission* the logic of the digital virtual not only constructs a trajectory toward an idealized vision of the self, but also forms the phantasmatic ground for the location of such desire “in” or “on” a space within which the idealized self remains a set of potential relations. The holographic is thus not only full of potential, but of potentialities.

The always doubled nature of literary narrative—its production of a field of verisimilitude that in its production constantly foregrounds its fictionality—is what renders even realist narrative as always expressive of a matrix of fantasies that encompass “the writer,” the reading subject, and the myriad conscious and unconscious threads that run through and constitute the text(s). In *Jane Eyre* and *Transmission*, various fantasies of possibility of self are expressed that are engaged in a meta-textual relationship to the possibilities of subjectivity itself, as they do so through the inscription of subjectivity into public, literary space. They are realist gestures of fantasy: the virtual is the interface for that fantasy for the characters, as the novel is the interface of that fantasy for its readers.

I have argued that Brontë’s text relies on a “representative” place for that fantasy that reproduces the ideological construction of the protagonist, while Kunzru’s employs

the digital virtual for a field in which Arjun exceeds the delineation of his initial presentation to the reader. Put in deliberately simple terms, Jane arrives where she should; Arjun ends up where he was never meant to be able to be. Taken at face value, each of these resolutions appears to be an expression of “self-help” ideas of pragmatic acceptance versus indefatigable hope. But each novel invokes the presence of an alternate space that itself differently positions that space as phenomenal and experiential ground. Arjun’s epistemological frame is one in which the public embodiment of identity functions holographically: the digital and public synecdoches of Arjun and Leela produce material effects in ways in which their bodily selves could not, and indeed, “ontologically” could not because of the location of subjective identity at one spatio-temporal actualization. Arguably, Jane Eyre must arrive at a singular point that crystallizes the text’s ideological concerns because there is only one of her; Arjun and Leela must dissipate into Deleuzian ideas because they never were and never can be just one—and that, in addition, it would be precisely the crystallization under one signifying or taxonomic identifier that would render them legible to system of policing. The difference is always simultaneously and inextricably one of both history and its concomitant relationship to technology, in addition to the interrelated causes and effects of each of those factors on the conception of the self. Jane’s fantasy is a function of the nineteenth-century *and* print; Arjun’s fantasy is a function of the twenty-first century *and* the internet.

The implication here is that the spatio-temporal multiplicity of a subject and its virtual representations within the digital give experiential, material and epistemological

ground to what was once a “metaphor” of a multiple post-modern subject. Multiplicity, hybridity, unfixity, and opaqueness: these are all rhetorical constructions for dimensions of subjectivity that “are” but also cannot be experienced simultaneously. They are instead terms one might use to describe the relationality and movement between the various spatio-temporal expressions of a holographic self. No doubt, they can be circumlocuted, gestured toward and even felt, but not *experienced*. The digital virtual gives ground to a field in which those metaphors remain metaphorical but can nonetheless be experienced as if they were not—which is to say that the effects of affect are of particular concern. To wit, the production of a *holographic field* enables the experience of a spatio-temporally multiple *holographic self*. And though it would be a stretch to argue that, in any comprehensive sense, the digital virtual represents the externalization of the imagination in the same way that writing represented the externalization of language, it would also miss something to say there is nothing of that sort going on. Thus, it is to the immanent experience of the metaphors of post-structuralism that I now turn my attention. What happens when a field of self-presentation not only represents a desire for a post-positionality self, but instead is one in which the holographic self is reconceived *first* as a spatio-temporally multiple self that never resolves—and yet remains “bodily”?

CHAPTER 3: THE FLICKERING SUBJECT OF MOVEMENT-VISION

In the 2012 German science fiction film *Transfer*, an elderly white, affluent couple use a new technology to pluck their identities from their failing bodies and place them into the “willing” frames of two young volunteers, who happen to be from refugees from Eastern Africa. The film is shot through with intriguing and troubling questions of race and privilege, and it engages those ideas by also being intimately engaged with the ways in which identity, projection, and technology intermingle. Perhaps most poignantly for my concerns, although the identities of German couple, Hermann and Anna, occupy the bodies for twenty hours a day, host subjects Apolain and Sara still retain control of their own bodies for the remaining four. Rather than, for example, Arjun’s relationship with his public persona in *Transmission*, or his eventual scattering into potentiality, *Transfer* collapses the boundaries of exterior, relational space, the body, and multiple identities into the same biological frame. It is not so much Cartesian mind-body dualism as much as a kind of hyper-Deleuzian take on it: a multiplicity of identity referents within the same signifiatory object; or, a subjectivity whose relation to the texts of identity categories literally changes depending on what time of day it is.

Though the film follows the expected moral and personal quandaries, it ends with Hermann and Anna gaining ultimate control of their new vessels, erasing their hosts’ identities in the process. As such, Hermann and Anna are now forever doubled, but in almost the inverse manner of, say, W. E. B. DuBois’s use of the term³⁵; they are permanent colonizers of particular bodies, always both privileged, white Germans who are also read

as young and black. In this particular trajectory, *Transfer* thus very messily collapses a virtual Other of self-interpellation and “a self” into a body that, according to film’s own production of what is and is not German, seems impossible. As such, if the mimetic distance of self and projection was key to the notion of subject-constitution in chapters one and two in which the holographic self was conceived primarily as a mediated relation between a binary pairing of bodily identity and hologram, then in this chapter, my interest is in the effects created when that “distance”—whether spatial or temporal—starts to collapse, producing a holographic self that is not a pairing, but a swarm of identity folding in on itself in often non-linear, non-hierarchical ways. Put another way, what if the holograms of the holographic self—everything from the self-representation of the Facebook profile to the phantasmatic identity of the massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) to the ongoing narrativized textual construction of a Twitter persona—are not only multiple, but also engage in a competitive relation with an ever-receding bodily identity? What then is “identity” or “subjectivity” when there is an experiential and social ground to be mapped out as the subject-as-flux, a thing that can only ever be a receding relation between competing sites of expression?

If the day-to-day social experience of identity is very often a question of its mediation through signs, an important question is then where does “digital” as both a medium for signification, and a potential epistemological category, fit into such scenarios? Furthermore, if representation is indivisible from signification—that, for example, the signification of a body and the signification of signs of identity inevitably start to blur into an often phenomenologically indivisible mass of interior and exterior—

then the question for this chapter is this: rather than the virtual as tactical conduit or the virtual as supra-subjective space of fantasy, what happens to the literary depiction of a subject when digitality as a medium of representation forms the discursive ground for a blurring of the division between subject and object, self and other, legible and obscured such that the subject is a *movement* between differing expressions of self? Instead of literary texts positing the physical and the digital as two different ontological fields which meet in the overlap of the interface, what happens when they are part and parcel of the same phenomenological one, interfacing in complex internal spatio-temporal relation to render the subject and the signs of subjectivity as a movement between always-in-motion nodes of a matrical identity?

One key difference between an internal and external self-relation lies in taxonomy and legibility. There is an assumed relationship between the attachment of a single taxonomic signifier, a singular material body in which an identity is “housed,” and a singular conception of subjectivity. If I am referred to as Navneet, it is this taxonomic definition that acts as a discursive grouping for all the various positions of identity I might occupy: male, South Asian, straight, English-speaking, and so on. It is also this chain of signifiers of the body that, I argue, is phenomenally and discursively troubled by digital technology, inasmuch as particular markers of identity may have contradictory expressions in differing fields, so that a “shy” or “visible minority” marker may only register in a particular physical or online field, but not another.

As I have argued, any phenomenological account of digital technology from the last twenty years must acknowledge two things: that the “reduction” of the subject to signs is an inevitability of all technology, particularly language; and that like most effects of digitality, the potential newness encountered is not one of a clear epistemological novelty, but the degree and extent to which particular ideas—in this case, a body-as-text, or identity as a text-of-signs—becomes more radical, or more radically available. If the holographic self is a modified form of the virtual self, such as in the disparity between Wilde’s *Dorian Gray* and Malkani’s *Jas/on*, then the novelty of the category is in the holographic and “the virtual”—namely, in what the *field* of virtuality does to a *conception* of the subject. The subject-as-such has always been virtual, always a thing receding into the future. Objects, such as the book, the telegraph and the telephone, externalized and further mediated the reading of a subject-as-text. Digital technology, however, has not just expanded massively the phenomenal occurrence of such objects in day-to-day life; it has also enabled the infiltration of subjects-as-texts into experience as a kind of “ambient intimacy.”³⁶ The apprehension of the existence of “a subjectivity” when it peppers the corners of one’s awareness through text messages, social networking, video chats and so on are not only augmentations of an existing set of communication technologies, but also the ground of non-bodily intersubjectivity. The materiality of the network that sustains it enables the ongoing relation between body and dispersed representations that form the holographic self.

The Self that Bleeds Pixels

At the same time, however, this expansion of fields of signification—the fact that “an identity” can not only signify multiply in the traditional semiotic sense, but signify simultaneously *and incompletely* across spatially or temporally dispersed fields of exchange—means that the relational structure of the holographic self, while possibly a binary structure of self and aspirational self-representation, can also be a multiplied or lateral relation between those sites of representation or expression. This is to say that if the holographic self as an analytic concept tries to give shape to the back and forth between bodily and non-bodily, it may also be conceived as inverting both the binariness and the bodily-focus of the phantasmatic holographic self. It may be thought of as a rhizomatic or swarm-like relation amongst a multiplicity of self-representations. It is also an idea that I believe may be elucidated by a brief but vital detour to look at the work of noted theorist Brian Massumi, particularly that found in the chapter “The Bleed” in *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Sensation, Affect*.

In the chapter, Massumi’s focus is upon a key idea in his thought: conceiving of the subject as “movement first” and coding or signification second. It is part of an ongoing project by the thinker to theorize and foreground “interstitiality” as part of a broader emphasis on affect in which the movement and flux between specific bodily, spatial, temporal, and positioned actualizations are more important than catching “the body in cultural freeze-frame” (Massumi 3). “The Bleed” specifically asks how one might conceive of the movement between co-ordinates as a way to (better) understand the subject. This

aspect of the chapter is my focus, for it articulates a useful analogous structure and analytic lens for devising what a logic of a rhizomatic holographic self might look like as well as how and why the two novels in this chapter are differently invested in either returning to or resisting a subject that can be located on one plane of a signifiatory field.

Massumi's example in this chapter is an anecdote from Ronald Reagan's autobiography in which the actor-cum-politician, in seeing himself on screen, is disappointed to see that rather than having become someone else, he is still only himself. Fittingly for this project, Massumi suggests that "the process in question is... a seeing of *oneself*" (47, emphasis in original) but that, furthermore, "the problem with acting isn't that it carries the actor out of himself... [but] that it doesn't take the actor *far enough* outside of himself" (47, emphasis in original). As such, at least one issue engaged is not only the process of becoming in relation to a projection of self, but also the desire to become-other through a technologized externalization of self. Rather than an issue of a difference between "reality and appearance, true and false, acting and not acting" (Massumi 48), the actual issue at stake is "ontological and cuts across those registers. It bears on the completeness of an appearance, which it locates on a scale of intensity, as higher- or lower-degree reality" (Massumi 48). At stake is the desired affective change of state between Reagan the man and Reagan's self-imagining finds no corresponding representation on screen.

Massumi usefully terms the desire for a simple replication of a performed self as mirror-vision, and the echoes of other theoretical mirrors—like those of the fantasies of

exceeding the self in chapters one and two, for example—are impossible to ignore. As he suggests, “this specular structure of doubled identity” (Massumi 48) is one in which “you resemble yourself perfectly” (Massumi 48) as the conception of self and self-projection are inextricably intertwined, which means that producing difference or change is a problem. He also suggests that “the difference between you and your specular complement is the minimal difference allowing movement” (Massumi 49), and here Massumi is pointing out the risk of reification in self-imagining—a phenomenon I have argued that a logic of the digital virtual troubles through its invocation of a field for non-bodily intersubjective exchange. Yet, given that I have suggested that the holographic self in this project is often involved in a *desire* to exceed positionality—to “move past,” at least in representation, the reificatory structure of a subject position, a grid of subject positions, and a body—then it is interesting that Massumi is so focused on Reagan’s desire to get “out of that mirror-vision” (49), or “beyond the dual structuring of specular identity in which one compensates for a lack in the other” (49).

The response is movement-vision. Rather than relative mediation—what Massumi, perhaps invoking Martin Buber, calls the “ongoing reciprocal determination of I-me/I-you” (50)—there is instead an absolute self-distancing, a desire to become entirely other. Movement-vision is “discontinuous with itself” (Massumi 50) precisely because it is in motion. It is Massumi’s emphasis upon temporality, and more specifically, temporality-as-interminable-process, that is the key differentiator here, the aim being “movement as such, in its difference from stasis” (50). The point is thus to give a vocabulary and

ideological ground to thinking of the subject as something other than a relational structure between subject and object. As Massumi argues:

The elementary unit of the space of movement-vision is not a generalizing subject coupled with an object in general, a self-identical observer who recognizes the object as the same, as what is common to different movement and stasis. Its elementary unit is the singularity of a movement that includes a perspective which occludes the actual functioning of both the subject and the object. The objectness of the object is attenuated as the subject, seeing itself as others see it, comes to occupy the object's place as well as its own. Simultaneously occupying its place and the object's, the subject departs from itself. The subject-object symmetry of mirror-vision is broken. (50)

One could argue as to whether or not this constitutes an “ontological” assertion. I would argue it is more useful, however, to think of movement-vision as a constitutive analytic approach that attempts to resist subject-object relations, in favour of the “movement” between subjects and objects, and by extension the affective dimensions of relation-in-flux. It is the interstitiality of motion that becomes important—what Massumi suggests “is relationality itself, freed from its terms” (51)—because what has been often overlooked is “the space between the subject-object poles, superposed, fractured, multiplied” (Massumi 51). To refer back to the Deleuzian terms I have already invoked, subject-object poles lend themselves to possibility, the interstitial motion between them, potentiality.

What allows Reagan to overcome his feeling of simply being himself is to play an amputated man by experiencing the illusion of having his legs hidden from him by a contraption made for just that scene. It should be noted that Massumi's use of this example is useful precisely because of its emphasis on the body and affect as defining, transformative experiences—namely, that it is only in the illegible process of feeling as a body that anything resembling becoming-other is possible—or, as Massumi puts it, that “acting is a labour of feeling, but ... [that] feeling is inseparable from motility” (53). Yet, I continue to focus on the example because the emphasis upon becoming-other has been at the core of this project. That “other-ness” has thus far been thought of in terms of an excess or an exceeding—for Jas/on, of moving past a specific linkage of body and a racialized identity, and for Arjun, identity versus that of the identity-receding-into-the-Idea. In this chapter, however, my emphasis is upon taxonomy, collapse, and the title of Massumi's chapter, too—“The Bleed”—in which rather than a distanced relational structure between an aspirational field and a body, what is instead of import is what happens to the subject when a movement between the names of a self, or sites of self/expression, are foregrounded either by a narrative or a narrative logic of the digital virtual. What then becomes important, to return to the text at hand, is that “Reagan invents a technology of the event”—namely, the contraption through which he feels what it is to be amputated—“that is also a technology of the self and a technologizing of the self” (Massumi 55), and that the transformative experience means that the “change is expressed as a blend between the exemplary event and his ordinary world, a bleed between the two” (Massumi 55). As such, technologizing the self is not only a way to

express a movement beyond, either to return to a pure(r) state or instead to escape into abstract purity; rather, it can also be a way of having the self bleed into itself, the movement between self-instantiations always a movement from an “exemplary event” to the incorporation of that “supplement” into the present-self-in-motion. To wit, movement-vision—a view of the subject or object that prioritizes movement over coding or signification—is a useful way to understand the movement of the subject between an ongoing matrix of self-representations.

To be clear, Massumi is entirely critical of Reagan’s need constantly to find the unity of “being-complete,” as he argues that this is what drives Reagan to become not only President, but also a president of “the lofty lure of postwar unity” (65) with all its neoliberal, conservative thrust. Yet, Massumi’s vocabulary and approach to the subject is still useful for this project and this chapter because it ties together key ideas: firstly, that taxonomy, taken as an emphasis upon semiotics or signification in general, effaces the movement and space between (assumed) singular instantiations of the subject or object; and that, secondly, the movement between taxonomies, signs, names, expressions, can not only be enabled by the logic of technology-as-techne of self, but in the guise of “movement-vision” also provide a useful way for thinking through a self that is in spatial and temporal flux as metaphor not simply for “subjective multiplicity,” but also for how the subject-as-flux and the logic of the holographic self may be intertwined.

In light of this emphasis upon movement-vision and collapse, I would like to look at two literary texts to think through how they react to the representation of subjectivity

through the *techne* of a self becoming a common part of sociological phenomena.

Further, however, what happens to the binary structure of the holographic self when it is multiplied across spatio-temporal fields, and in doing so pushes the issue of positionality to its limits? In order to explore both, I read the 2003 novel, *Pattern Recognition*, by William Gibson and the 2011 novel, *Open City*, by Teju Cole. My primary question for these novels concerns how they both depict and deploy the relationship between legible signs of identity and what the text constructs as characters' interior space, paying particular attention to the possibility of locating a subject as singular, unified or transparent to both itself and the reader. What all of this aims to set up, however, is a comparative reading of how *Pattern Recognition* and *Open City* not only respond to, but also express through textual structure, stylistics and epistemology, the following idea: that the broad socio-historical fact of internet usage massively expands the degree to which subjects must comprehend the signs of other subjects in the absence of an immanent body; and that as a result, the dispersed and scattered amalgam of signs is not only usefully articulated by a holographic self that moves past a binary pairing, but that the newly multiplied concept becomes an interface not for fantasy, but for a notion of self-relation that gives phenomenal and inscriptive ground to the multiplicity of self, and to the multiplicity-of-self-as-movement. In these novels, there is again a desire for a post-positionality self, but one which complicates the ostensibly "liberatory" approach I have taken in chapters one and two, and instead suggests that the desire to exceed a singular, taxonomically- or signifierily-rooted sense of self complicates an understanding of the linkage between the self and consequence.

As I have argued in earlier chapters, the aim is not to suggest glibly that this situation is “new”; rather, that the expanded commonness and ubiquity of the phenomenon foregrounds fields for self-representation that prioritize the non-bodily depiction of self. While in earlier chapters, I have paired a historical text with a contemporary one in order to highlight the differences enabled by these contextual changes, I wish to do something slightly different here. Although *Pattern Recognition* and *Open City* are less than a decade apart, I argue that they both exist in a transitional period and, as such, the later novel invokes a remarkably different conception of the subject and holographic self than the earlier one. Though one cannot posit a radical, broad change in subjectivity or identity in the space of a decade, I think it plausible to assert that the mainstreaming in North America (where both novels are set) of social networking technology may differently inflect a literary representation of subjectivity. I will also argue, however, that *Open City* enacts or performs the effect of the central contradiction or incompatibility of *Pattern Recognition*, and this very enaction renders the novel as an ideal expression of the relationship between the holographic and identity. Thus, the aim is not a strict study in differences—à la *A Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Londonstani*—but an examination of how the ambivalently presented ideas of Gibson’s text manifest in the altogether more impressionist work of Teju Cole. The latter text not only “complicates” the idea of the holographic self, but also suggests that a “holographic” effect upon identity—by which I mean evincing a logic of a holographic self—is a troubling one which evokes arguably negative consequences of the de-linking of the subject from systems of power predicated upon the legibility and singularity of identity.

Before proceeding, however, a brief summary of both texts. Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* is among the first major, explicitly post-9/11 novels. It centres on Cayce Pollard, a young American woman who is endowed with a strange gift to assess the market viability of particular signs, be they logos or products, but that also bestows her with an "allergy" or "sensitivity" to certain brand signs that make her suffer both physical and psychological effects. Her father—a former secret service agent—disappeared the morning of September 11th, 2001 without explanation, leaving Cayce unable to come to terms with his death. While employed by London marketing firm Blue Ant for her talents, Cayce also traces "the footage," a series of anonymously created and deeply ambivalent video clips of various non-narrative scenes released online that foster a fastidious community of "footage heads" who constantly argue over the veracity of the film. Cayce is then employed by Blue Ant to find the maker of the footage to discover not only its origins, but also the key to its viral success. To do so, Cayce teams up with online friends Parkaboy and others, who create an imaginary woman to seduce a young Japanese man who has information about the encryption of the footage files. At the same time, Cayce also works with Boone Chu, a new Blue Ant employee, and Ngemi, Volkov and Magda, whom Cayce meets at random in London, to investigate a litany of clues and traces of the footage, while avoiding others pursuing the same goal. Through a series of serendipitous events, Cayce acquires enough information to go to Russia, where she discovers that the work is produced by Nora, the mute daughter of a Russian magnate. The footage is in fact composed of a plethora "real" video fragments digitally stitched together into a new, fictional pastiche. The footage is supported and distributed by Nora's sister Stella, while

the entire process is sustained and funded by both massive amounts of black market money and the efforts of inmates at a jail who render the film. With the mystery of the footage solved, connections to the Russian mafia allow Cayce more access to information about her father's fate. With those plot lines tied up, and after a drug-induced spell of unconsciousness, Cayce is "cured" of her gift, and the novel ends with the protagonist happily falling asleep.

The plot of *Open City* is far less linear and clear. In fact, unlike the trajectory of all the other novels in this project, which often have a clear starting point of action and a clear resolution, part of the reason I chose *Open City* as the final text of this project is for its non-linear plot and lack of any neat ending. Rather than, say, the *Bildungsroman* trope of an arrival at a particular vision of a subject sustained by the hologram as interface between self and phantasmatic representation, *Open City* instead arrives at a hermeneutic impossibility: that of a singular conception of a subject, or the location of such a specific moment or place. The novel focuses on Julius, originally from Nigeria and now living in New York while a medical resident in psychiatry. He has recently broken up with his girlfriend Nadège, and spends much of his time walking around New York, reflecting. The text jumps back and forth between past and present, without warning. In the past, the narrator describes Julius's time in Nigeria at high school, his father's death, and a slow, sullen falling out with his German mother. In the present Julius spends time with Dr. Saito, an older, retired professor with whom he discusses literature. He travels to Brussels, where he befriends Farouq, an Arab intellectual working at an internet cafe, and makes friends with an elderly Belgian woman on the plane, with whom he has dinner,

while with another he has a random sexual encounter. Toward the end of the text, he spends time with friends, is violently assaulted by two youths, and reconnects with Moji, who shares a shocking revelation about Julius's past. The text ends with no reflection from Julius on the revelation, and instead focuses on a deeply ambivalent image of America and immigration.

Why the pairing, then, of an ostensibly "post-postcolonial" reflection on identity and a science-fiction take on signification? There are two reasons: first, each text either follows or quite explicitly and specifically abandons the pattern of the *Bildungsroman* set up in earlier chapters, in which the protagonist of the text must come to grips with some deficiency of self to arrive (or not arrive) at a more complete version of self; second, that both texts foreground within that sense of a quest the issue of recognizing the self through its representation in signs, and in doing so, provide differing resolutions to *how* a subject is positioned and read within and on fields of signification. The difference I wish to emphasize, however, is of two differing perspectives on the phenomenal collapse of various discursive dichotomies: subject and object; interior and exterior; and past and present. While *Pattern Recognition* ultimately asserts the taxonomic stability of a subject in light of the ever-present potential effacement of a link between a subject and its various representations—and thus arguably, does not invoke a holographic *self* at all—*Open City* explodes the multi-faceted expressions of self in a manner that renders the kind of singular conception of the subject fostered by its designation it with a singular taxonomic sign impossible. In doing so, *Open City* provides both a model of the holographic self as a shifting between a multiplicity of representations that refutes a

singular identity, and perhaps more importantly evokes a logic of the digital virtual in order to ground that movement between multiple points as an act of self-inscription. It is, in a sense, Massumi's movement-vision, narrativized, underpinned by a logic of a digital, holographic self.

Key to this is an examination of how, in both *Pattern Recognition* and *Open City*, the legibility of a subject and the attendant concerns of taxonomy, naming and object relations are not simply "complicated" by digital technology, but rendered in such a fashion that the recognition of self is as much an act of writing as it is of reading. However, *Pattern Recognition* runs together two contradictory approaches to the relationship between a subject and representation. The first is that of a sovereign subject who can ultimately arrive at a wholeness through a "happy concordance" of the subject and desire; the second is a mode in which a subject is only ever an expression of systems, ideology, or desire. The contrast in the novel, however, centres these two disparate ideas of a subject in relation to either a fixed notion of signification, in which an end to the chain of signification brings relief from a given problem, and forever unfixed or multiplied signification, that renders a subject unmoored. In doing so, the text is positioned at an ideological midpoint between the notion of the completed, transparent subject and the subject-as-object forever withdrawing from view. In a sense, *Pattern Recognition's* construction around a contradiction may be said to express the problems of signification in relation to digitality: that the novel's incompatible views that are run together push up against the sign as ground for a system of understanding, expressing through contradiction a potential epistemological incompatibility. But if in *Pattern*

Recognition the inherent contradiction of the plot expresses the difficulty of digital presentation of self, troubling the very concept of representation and subjectivity, then *Open City* is the effect. The representation of Julius is itself a performative textual process of identity construction in which the subject-as-object evinces the epistemological effects of digital media to forever render its protagonist as an ongoing subtraction of a matrix of sites of subjectivity-in-flux, but unlike Cayce in *Pattern Recognition*, does so through a concomitant collapse of the spatio-temporal, the historical and the divisions between subjects themselves, and constructs the self as a holographic relation between sites of self-representation. Ultimately, I argue that Julius as literary construct can be read through Katherine Hayles's notion of the flickering signifier and the aforementioned ideas from Brian Massumi "The Bleed," such that Julius is an expression of a digitally signifying subject that is primarily marked by its movement between instantiations rather than the "freeze frame" at a singular location of one expression of self. As a result, the novel evinces a de-emphasis upon a body which prioritizes the play of signs in relation to the signification of identity. Julius is arguably a "non-digital" posthuman subject because, as Hayles argues, "the posthuman is 'post' not because it is necessarily unfree, but because there is no a priori way to identify a self-will that can be clearly distinguished from an other-will" (4). As such, a comparative reading of the ends of both texts produces two radically different visions of the subject, and the mechanisms of legibility and recognition within particular historical and epistemological frames.

Apophenia and Other Easily-Made Mistakes

How do the digital virtual and the material intertwine? In what way does the availability of a field of signification for objects and subjects affect the subject's relationship to signification? If in previous chapters my concern was with how this field of signification is used in a utilitarian sense to further the possibilities available to a "traditional" understanding of a bodily subject, then in what ways does digital technology (re)Enframe³⁷ subjects?

These questions are at the forefront of William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*. Indeed, Gibson is commonly thought of as an author at the forefront of the idea of the digital and literature. He is, after all, famous for much more than simply coining the term cyberspace.³⁸ His work has presented, predicted and framed to an almost remarkable degree the concerns of the digital present. From the notion of the singularity to the postmodern pressure on signification, Gibson's work has become synonymous with contemporary concerns with technology in literature. Yet, *Pattern Recognition* specifically is of such interest because the 2003 text innovatively traces the infiltration of brands into day-to-day materiality, highlighting the problematic tension between the calcifying signification of brands-as-signs and, conversely, the troubled, increasingly unstable sign-referent relationship between body and identity. Frederic Jameson argues that Gibson's "cyberpunk constitutes a kind of laboratory experiment in which the geographic-cultural light spectrum and bandwidths of the new system are registered" (107), and *Pattern Recognition* seems to play out fictionally the concerns about digitality and the recognition

of meaning. As Veronica Hollinger notes in “Stories about the Future: From Patterns of Expectation to Pattern Recognition,” Gibson’s novel “brilliantly conveys the phenomenology of a present infused with futurity, no longer like itself, no longer like the present” (452). What speaks most directly, however, to my project is that *Pattern Recognition* “is a story about how we find ourselves already on the other side of radical difference, even as the future seems ever more out of reach” (Hollinger 452). As such, the novel lends itself well to an examination of how the representation of subjectivity or identity is altered and affected by the availability of a digital field for both signification and sociality.

At the same time as the novel explores these ideas, there is a meta-textual question of how it frames these socio-material changes. *Pattern Recognition*, particularly in its conclusion, leaves a wide space for critique—specifically in the potentially contradictory notions of subjectivity that posit opposing ideas of wholeness and completeness that other aspects of the text resist. It is a novel that, almost inadvertently, posits as its central narrative conceit a contradiction, an incompatibility. In fact, despite the text’s rather glib, neatly wrapped-up conclusion, *Pattern Recognition* is almost inadvertently a textual expression of what one might call an epistemological incompatibility. On the one hand, it posits as central to its main character a clear relationship between the brand-as-commodified-sign and origin of commodity relations, and the social context of its signification. On the other, it presents as contrast the footage, which is a deliberate fictional textual gesture to the sign without either origin or referent as the only possible escape from the calcification of all signification as brand—all the while seeking out a

“real” of sorts in the form of a true origin, or truth, for both the footage and the fate of Cayce’s father. The text circulates around competing notions of a desire for the real.

As a result, the text moves toward another fundamental incompatibility in its conception of the subject, one encapsulated by the contrast of Cayce and Nora. Cayce’s narrative trajectory resolves when the mysteries of footage and her father are solved, finally rendering Cayce as “whole” or “complete” through the very calcification of the once-fluid signifiatory processes with which she grappled. On the other hand, Nora is forever “the unfinished subject,” but perhaps more importantly, has her subjectivity infinitely deferred as it is mediated through the digital (re)manipulation of signs. It is, quite literally, split apart by shards of metal, the “inorganic” dividing the self from itself. Nora is, in a manner that complicates the traditional literary notion of the idea, the subject rendered as object. The contradiction of both of these ideas of subjectivity, however, can be read as the text’s attempt at dealing with the production of a subject as a digitally-circulated object within a system of signification that, through its complex relationship to referentiality, can often deny a taxonomic and discursive relation between the subject and the representation of that subject. But rather than a Barthesian commentary on “the author,” in doing so, *Pattern Recognition* does not simply skirt around the possibility of a subject conflated as object; rather, it expresses a late capitalist tension in which an economy of signs and commodities also sublate the subject into these relations of objects. To wit, the contradiction at work shows two sides of the socio-historical effects of digitality upon the conception of the subject.

Before proceeding, however, a short note on page numbers: I have deliberately used the April 2003 Penguin Putnam electronic edition of the novel. It does not contain page numbers as such, but rather only numbered pages of each section. The section is designated first, the section page number second, for example (2.1). I do so to foreground the manner in which digitality reframes traditional understandings of not only indicial markers, but also taxonomy in general.

The Natural Rhythm of Signification

How *Pattern Recognition* locates a self in relation to various modes and contexts as well as self-recognition provides an appropriate way to think about the text, as already at its opening the novel is intimately concerned with the assumption of one context—the natural—and its upset at the hands of modernity. The very first line concerns jet lag and the “ever-circling wolves of disrupted circadian rhythm” (Gibson 1.1), both of which signify how a subject is positioned in time, but also in relation to geographic space. That the novel begins in this “spectral non-hour” (Gibson 1.1) quickly points to its concern not only with temporality, but also with how to locate both subject and object when those epistemological frames of Kantian first principles are somehow disjointed. At the same time, the narrator also implies a potential unity of these forces. If Cayce’s jet lag occurs because “her mortal soul is leagues behind her” (Gibson 1.1), then the text starts by invoking the possibility of an abstract resolution to this disunity of subject in time.

The text’s conceit that Cayce is a kind of “dowser in the world of global marketing” (Gibson 2.1) relies on her “sometimes violent reactivity to the semiotics of the

marketplace” (Gibson 2.1). It seems there are two relationships between a sub/object and a signifiatory field set-up: one that is pure or natural, and one that is not. There is the “broken” relationship between self and space-time, and its implied “fix.” Strangely though, Cayce herself does everything she can to resist normative signification and being subsumed into a process of signification in which the image becomes indivisible from the commodity processes behind it. It is a complex, potentially futile attempt to control signification, yet one made clear by the description of her clothing:

A small boy’s black Fruit of the Loom T-shirt, thoroughly shrunken, a thick gray V-necked pullover purchased by the half-dozen from a supplier to New England prep schools, and a new and oversized pair of black 501’s, every trademark carefully removed. Even the buttons on these have been ground flat, featureless, by a puzzle Korean locksmith, in the Village, a week ago. (Gibson 3.1)

As Lee Konstantinou notes, “paradoxically, *soul* and *authenticity* for Cayce mean emptying the human hand from the process of production, [and in] the removal of the semiotically specific markers from consumer products ... Cayce strips herself of meaning as much as possible, minimizing (or minimal-izing) her *semiotic footprint*” (4, original emphasis). It is, however, more complex than just that. On the one hand, the text marks out Cayce—an individual with a supernatural sensitivity to brands—as someone who refuses subsumption into an economy of brand-signs. At the same time, the material reality of the text’s world and ours, “an economy of brand-signs” is something that at best can only be hidden or obscured temporarily, the signifiers filed down to reveal a blankness that nonetheless, in its non-signification in the shape of that which signifies,

leaves a trace of the capitalist processes that produced it. Cayce's desire to not signify in certain ways is, in a sense, thus a stalling tactic.

The text grapples with this subjective relationship to the brand-sign, and both Konstantinou and Jameson pay close attention to the stylistic manner of the text that makes the brand name almost impossible to ignore—or rather, frames it as the precession of the calcified sign. The text is constantly shot through with brand names, often in ways that ask readers to fill in gaps using their own knowledge of brands. Damien's Mac computer is first introduced only as a "faithful Cube" (4.8), while with the array of "a German filter ... [and] an Italian electric kettle" (3.8) the reader is left to fill in names such as Brita, Delonghi or Alessi. There is a distinction here from Gibson's *Neuromancer*, which is filled with brand names: a "white, Braun coffeemaker" (27) that shows up more than once, or the then-novel effect of nostalgia for "a Sony monitor" (46). I would argue that the contrast is a historical one—that even in the thirty years between the novels, brand significance changes so quickly that in *Pattern Recognition*, the absence of *specific* brand names better foregrounds the ubiquity of brands in general. Nonetheless, the effect is that "the reader is being positioned to see the world through the limited third-person focalization of a character 'with a compulsive memory for brand names' [PR, 27]" (Konstantinou 70) such that one of the few options remaining for the dedicated reader is "to adopt the hermeneutic disposition of the coolhunter" (Konstantinou 70). The reader of *Pattern Recognition* is not asked to recognize patterns as much as she is asked to simply accept the "given" fact of branding. Blank signifiers are quickly reterritorialized into a brand-sign economy.

As such, Konstantinou argues that the “coolhunter ... becomes much more than a job title or an occupational choice, but rather a hermeneutic disposition” (72), a subjective node upon a matrix of object-ive relations of signification and capital. On the one hand, Cayce tries desperately to avoid her subsumption into an economy of signification, as she makes her living through the very doubled sense of that economy. Cayce’s position is thus one of obvious contradiction. It is one in which “her quest to find the maker of the footage puts her in the paradoxical position of having to help her employer ... commodify the art she loves precisely for its apparent separation from the processes of commodification” (Konstantinou 73), a paradoxical situation that mirrors the contradiction that I argue lies at the core of the text.

What, then, does one make of the apparent contradictions swirling around signification in the text? The subject of Gibson’s “logo-centric” world is thus one “who must arbitrate between, on one hand, the modernist and countercultural impulse to develop stylistic distinction as a means of accruing cultural capital and, on the other, the unlimited power of the market to analyze and commodify individual style” (Konstantinou 74). But it seems this idea needs to be pushed further in relation to the phenomenal ground of the signifiatory processes that underpin style—and the footage. Cayce’s contradictory relationship to the footage is one that posits, on the one hand, a referential structure of (individual) style that can always be looped back into commodity relations, and the fictional representation of an aesthetic object that deliberately resists these sublative processes. Perhaps more to the point is to question whether Cayce the subject is merely a conduit for a supra-subjective evaluation of the social worth of a brand-sign—

itself an obvious contradiction—or does the text deliberately skirt around the confusion as textual gesture? That answer, it seems, would lie in Cayce’s “gift.”

A Sensitivity for Where the Sign Goes

Cayce suggests that her gift—or allergy—manifests as akin to perceiving something as “either blue or it’s not,” an evaluation seemingly without “an emotional investment” (Gibson 2.6). It is, in a sense, a quasi-Kantian argument that suggests the judgement, when detached from concepts, presents a universally valid measure of whether or not something is beautiful—or, in this case, marketable. As Konstantinou notes, “Cayce is curiously superhuman.... [She] seems able to simulate cognitively, in the black box of her brain, the collective behaviour of groups in ways that not even the most advanced supercomputers are able to” (79). Yet within this hierarchy of the beautiful-marketable and the not, it is somehow “the fake” that seems to set Cayce off. Tommy Hilfiger is especially problematic because it is “simulacra of simulacra of simulacra” (Gibson 3.1), “a diluted tincture of Ralph Lauren, who had himself diluted the glory days of the Brookes Brothers” (Gibson 3.2), and so on down the chain of infinite authenticity regression—presumably eventually moving past some “Tommy Hilfiger event horizon, beyond which it is impossible to be more derivative, more removed from the source, more devoid of soul” (Gibson 3.2). Cayce’s investment in the authentic as a discourse of purity, and its relation to her condition has “something to do with context” (Gibson 3.1)—though perhaps it is clearer if one says it is do with the overdetermination of the sign when it has passed out of reach of one, neat hermeneutic frame and into a

postmodern morass in which “Tommy Hilfiger” can signify not only a chain of copying, but each “stage’s” attendant swirl of values, cultural context, commodity production and history. Tommy Hilfiger is worst for Cayce because, in her knowledge of its cultural trajectory, it *signifies most multiply*.

Think, for example, of how in Tokyo, Cayce notes how the “mysteriously recontextualized” (Gibson 14.3) brand signs “have no effect on her” (Gibson 14.3). Konstantinou argues that this effect is part of a system that conceives cultural systems as maps of signification, and that, particularly in the case of Taki’s deception, “those who understand the ‘salient parameters’ that ‘maximize libidinal disturbance’ can subsequently manipulate a sexual ‘native speaker’ of this particular culture” (77). Cultures are hermetically sealed, static systems that can be understood and put to particular ends by a supra-cultural subjectivity that looms above them. More importantly, though, it is the “impossibility” of Japanese signs signifying for Cayce that renders them “safe.”

Cayce’s gift is, therefore, not simply culturally specific, but also rests on locating the function of a sign in a given referential system; it is the same situation that makes her gift a curse. Yet, as is the case with other strands in the text, this a perspective placed in dialogic contrast with a contradictory view—namely, one in which the spatio-temporal framework of the hermeneutic system that locates the sign, and the subject, collapses in upon itself, rendering the “location” or identity or name of both sign and subject difficult to read and multiply valent.

Collapse and Conflation: A World of Indistinguishable Signs

Perhaps no idea in *Pattern Recognition* more clearly gestures toward a kind of hermeneutic collapse than Gibson's invocation of monoculture and its global-capitalist predication. The entire issue of the Mirror-world—Cayce's name for the near-indistinguishable nature of England and America—seems the very definition of how capitalism co-opts and feeds on a narcissism of minor differences between commodities. The contrasts are all about specific objects—"plugs on appliances," "cars [that] are reversed, left to right, inside; telephone handsets have a different weight, a different balance; the covers look like Australian money" (Gibson 3.8)—as if it is only in the recognition of these minor contrasts that one can or cannot locate where one is. As Bigend states, when there are "no borders ... pretty soon there's no mirror to be on the other side of" (Gibson 11.4). The structure that enables differences—which, as Cayce points out, is related to the facts such as that Britain "was an industrial nation" (Gibson 11.3)—is collapsing into a global sameness.

Cayce knows that as someone involved in marketing she is "complicit in whatever it is that gradually makes London and New York feel more like each other, that dissolves the membranes between mirror worlds" (Gibson 23.1). After all, the very process of branding is what helps along a process of commodity production in which "history [is] erased via the substitution of an identical object" (Gibson 23.1). Yet the collapse of spatio-temporal distinctions is one concentrated and furthered by the phenomenality of digital technology that Cayce also tends to locate as home, the liminal non-space, or receding-space of the virtual—which, continuing the text's tensions, is also always discursively

constructed as a space. The Forum:Fetish:Footage site is both “a way now, approximately, of being at home” (Gibson 5.8), but also “one of the most consistent places in [Cayce’s] life, like a familiar cafe that exists somehow outside of geography and beyond time zones” (Gibson 5.8). Only here does Cayce find a comforting stasis. As Hollinger notes, “Cayce, an American whom we never see in the United States, travels to London, to Tokyo, back to London, to Moscow, and to Paris” (463). Physical spatial fixity is absent in this novel, and the “edginess and restlessness and *sleeplessness* of the narrative amount to a kind of formal representation of the present as a condition of incessant and spatialized *movement*” (Hollinger 464, original emphasis). When located in a new space, the narrator suggests that “[Cayce] has no internalized surface map of this city” (Gibson 2.11), which not only suggests the idea that the map precedes territory,³⁹ but also that Cayce’s apprehension of the world is always already filtered through the epistemological structures of the technology she so relies upon. It would be a mistake, however, to think of the “mirror-world” outside of the global material-economic relations that make such sameness and misrecognition possible. As Ngemi notes, all “markets are being rationalized by the internet” (Gibson 28.3), pointing to the text’s subtle evocation of how digital technology is intricately bound up in the furthering of global capitalism. As such, the text is intimately bound up in a set of related ideas: firstly, the rapid de- and reterritorialization of the sign by post-Fordist capitalist tendencies; the suspension of the digital virtual in relation to this ongoing process; an emphasis upon movement, whether of the characters, or the characters back and forth to “cyberspace”; and the intermingling of digital and physical that enables, or grounds, almost all of these phenomena. The focus

on movement, especially, becomes interesting in light of Massumi. If part of what makes movement-vision such a vital idea is that it is not coterminous with itself—that an ongoing process of becoming-other is something that often at least explicitly elided by the freeze-frame emphasis on signification and the identity of the subject or object—then *Pattern Recognition* may be said to both express *and resist* how digitality may form a fertile ground for “seeing” movement-vision in a particular historical expression.

The pattern of back-and-forth intermingling of physical and digital repeats throughout the text. The Liechtensteinian calculator—a small handheld, entirely mechanical calculator that is nonetheless very sophisticated—is a kind of precursor to the footage. The pre-digital device is meant to perform functions now hopelessly intertwined with electronic technology, and thus is itself a fetishistic sign of pre-internet technology and industrial manufacturing. In itself it is an intricate object, “heavy, dense, knurled for gripping,” seemingly “executed by a small-arms manufacturer” (Gibson 4.4), while “the sensation of its operation is best likened to that of winding a fine thirty-five millimeter camera” (Gibson 4.4). At the same time, as a calculator, it is a thing bound up in arguably “non-significatory” actions, a material object meant to produce “immaterial answers,” in as much as 2 or 3.1415 are not objects in the traditional sense. Similarly, Keiko is “the girl Taki’s been looking for all his life, even though nature’s never made one, and he’ll know that as soon as he lays eyes on this image” (Gibson 14.5). It is a classically libidinal expression of the Baudrillardian hyperreal. Additionally, Judy, the “real” subject behind the production of Keiko starts to feel that “the love Taki has to offer her is the love she’s waited for all her life” (Gibson 27.3), further conflating and collapsing any distinction

between what is true and not, particularly in terms of recognition under a single taxonomic identifiers that relates to a fixed referent.

The emphasis upon taxonomy also raises the issue of Cayce's name: that it is not only an unusual name, but also a homonym for "case"—in addition to the fact that this protagonist shares a name with the male protagonist of *Neuromancer*. Cayce, it turns out, is named after Edgar Cayce (Gibson 4.13), an American mystic, or "the Sleeping Prophet of Virginia Beach" (Gibson 4.13), who claimed to be able to make readings of the future in a trance. Though his name was pronounced "Casey," Cayce insists that it is pronounced case, though her mother has refused to tell her why she chose it (Gibson 4.13). As such, the fact the name is a homonym for "case" makes it analogous to the visible register that distinguishes lower from upper case: it is something that can only either be seen as difference, but not heard, and the significance of which only emerges in the knowledge of its contextual resonance with another kind of "dowser" with a (purported) similarly mystical ability. Cayce, like the signs that trigger her, is herself a marker that sets off chains of signification, imbricating her in two competing sets of hermeneutic frames. If on the one hand, Cayce's own signifier has a historical meta-textual resonance connecting her to another mystic, it is also fitting, then, that it has a fictional meta-textual one, too: namely, that in a homonymic sense, Cayce shares a name with Case from *Neuromancer*. Here, again, there is a tension: between one form of solidity that links Cayce to history in a clear chain of connection within the shared reality of both text and reader, and the internal, provisional reality produced by one fictional text in relation to another—a chain of connection that spills out with altogether less certainty.

One might also argue that Cayce's name is pronounced as such because Cayce is herself something of a puzzle or "case" to be solved—that the trajectory of her narrative is in some sense the solving of a case, not only of the footage, but Cayce's own ability and relationship to signification. As such, both of Gibson's "cases"—both Cayce and Case—thus evince some notion of the case study. *Neuromancer's* Henry Dorsett Case is someone whose body has been reconfigured again and again, first to be able to jacked in to the matrix, then to prevent it, and then again modified to once more enable an entrance into cyberspace. In a framework in which the culmination of the novel's heist plot is the production of a powerful AI that may connect with other extra-terrestrial AI's, the experimentalism of Case's journey is clear, in that the case study is that of the doubled sense of posthuman: that of the cyborg, technologized self, but also the intelligence that supersedes humanity's. Indeed, it is just that sense of novelty that marks *Neuromancer* out as such an important historical text. Conversely, Cayce's experimentalism—the extent to which she too is "case study"—is far more about her position in an economy of signification. The case study is about the effects of post-Fordist capitalism, rather than a posthuman future. She does, after all, relate to the sign in two ways: one on the level of affect, a kind of super-sensory relation to the functioning of the brand-sign, and another on the level of signification, as in her attempts to understand the footage in what one might call a "more traditional" signifiatory approach. The former seems to almost be super-material, the latter more ordinarily material—at least until it is discovered that the "expected" relation of materiality to referentiality is undercut by the footage itself. Cayce as a taxonomic marker is thus a part of the "case study" that forms the fundamental

tension of the novel: that of a transcendental signified versus a transcendental signifier—the possibility of, or need for, a fixed relation between a sign and referent, versus a signifier that forever expands outward to meet the need of any hermeneutic subject. It is the tension of “the solution” to the case, versus the footage as art object. Cayce herself is thus a “case” not only in the sense of the thing to be solved, but also a black box—a mysterious meeting point of two approaches to digitality and signification, the contrast between which proves, at least in this novel, to be fundamentally irresolvable.

Such interplay between digital and physical in the novel often erases hierarchies, such that the digital-as-hyperreal substitutes for the physical and what one might call the “traditionally real.” Cayce, however, always has a doubled view of space. In one instance, such as in regards to maps and territories, space is a mediated phenomenon, a liminal thing the perception of which is produced, as in the constant sense of the mirror-world; in another, it is very much an embodied, delineated thing. The broaching of Damien’s apartment is profoundly unsettling to Cayce because of the threat to her body, and both the “big and solid” (Gibson 5.2) keys to Damien’s apartment, and the “thick and cylindrical” spare robot parts that fit “neatly and solidly into her hand” (Gibson 5.5) suggest that reassurance is to be found in the physical. That her initial response is to return to her father’s advice that the “first priority ... [is to] secure the perimeter” (Gibson 6.1) speaks to her fear, but also evokes a connection between physical safety, delineated boundaries. But Cayce’s alarm at the intrusion comes out of two things, a trace of a website, and an act of digital communication, each of which are signals both sent out and that come in. To return a state of normalcy, she must enforce/reinforce “psychological

prophylaxis” so that she can “get on with ordinary business” (Gibson 6.2). Moreover, thinking back, Cayce feels guilty for secretly wanting “KGB spy devices to make it through, because she’d only ever been able to envision them as tiny clockwork brass submarines, as intricate in their way as Faberge eggs” (Gibson 6.3). To wit, Cayce “wants” to witness machine technology infiltrate stable boundaries, but realizes this it was “Win’s job, and his passion, to keep them from doing that” (Gibson 6.3).

Such a view of physicality is therefore another contradictory dichotomy of the text: space as ontological ground, and space as standing reserve, forever ready to be (re)rendered according to the techno-epistemological frame the subject apprehends through. But arguably, this constant confusion of certain epistemological categories runs parallel to the “confusion” or uncertainty that forms the narrative trajectory of the text. The concurrent “mysteries” of both the footage and the fate of Cayce’s father push the plot forward. What becomes both interesting and of particular significance to this project is the manner in which a series of historical and what one might call formal threads—i.e. the material context of the reception of signs—forms the very ground for the movement of plot. As such, it becomes necessary to think through not simply the significance of the footage and Win Pollard, but also the manner in which their significance is tied to the interlinked notions of signification, referentiality, and the techno-formal qualities of the apprehension of those modes.

The Footage-as-Father – or is it the other way around?

Cayce's father is a man who has disappeared during the morning of 9/11. He is an irretrievable ghost, something made something particularly evocative by the fact that he was "an evaluator and improver of physical security for American embassies worldwide" (Gibson 6.1). Win Pollard is a man who helped both reinforce and enforce bounded physical spaces against clear, recognizable threats. To use the "poetry" of former U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Win Pollard's aim was to take both known and unknown unknowns⁴⁰ and make them known enough to counteract. Simultaneously, Cayce's father is also the subject of his own "footage"—or at least a series of indeterminate clips that Cayce's mother sends—along with the caveat "I know this isn't your reality" (Gibson 21.7) that turns him into a sort of doubled ghost that leaves "Win somehow doubly undead" (Gibson 21.7). That he disappeared "in Manhattan on the morning of September 11, with no proven destination in the vicinity of the WTC" (Gibson 21.7) means that the very indeterminacy of his death is itself like an absent signifier. To wit, "Cayce's missing person ... was missing in some additional and specially problematic way" (Gibson 21.8), whether that his immersion in an overdetermined historical event, or the intensely strange context it temporarily produces in New York. Cayce's aim is to draw out an understandable timeline of events from this disrupted and upended hermeneutic context.

As such, a question of pattern recognition as a process or mental activity concerns meaning: a pattern becomes a pattern and not a random series when something can be elucidated from its provisional non-randomness, a change that is co-emergent with

“meaning.” The production of non-randomness is what negates randomness, logically speaking. But responding to another sighting of Billy Prion in a chapter aptly titled “Apophenia,” Cayce reminds herself that such a “coincidence” can only be an anomaly if “she thinks of herself as the center, the focal point of something she doesn’t, can’t, understand” (Gibson 13.5). Only in the *subject*-ive constitution of a pattern does the pattern become significant—and the echoes of Hayles’s emphasis upon pattern and randomness as determining qualities in a logic of digitality are clear. The question the text then seems to ask is what happens to the subject when the pattern of the object is not only a-referential and a-significatory, but also “unfinished”? Furthermore, it is significant that in the case of her father, Cayce’s attempt to make meaning is troubled and complicated by what the text constructs as a kind of historical break that, albeit temporary, seems to also mark out a broader historical change through its interrelation with technology.

Some insight into the text’s answer to these questions is revealed when Cayce writes out a faux-letter, one not meant to be sent to someone she believes to be the maker of the footage. Then, she mentions that her “father disappeared on September 11, 2001” (Gibson 32.2) and explicitly links this fact to the footage, which, Cayce says, has “become very important to me” (Gibson 32.2). The issue here is apparently that of finding a signified-as-an-end to a chain of signifiers, something that, amongst a slew of other ideas, comes out clearly in Cayce’s continuing communiqué:

We don’t know what you’re doing, or why. Parkaboy thinks you’re dreaming.

Dreaming for us. Sometimes he sounds as though he thinks you’re dreaming us. He

has this whole edged-out participation mystique: how we have to allow ourselves so far into the investigation of whatever this is, whatever you're doing, that we become part of it. Hack into the system. Merge with it, deep enough that it, not you, begins to talk to us. He says it's like Coleridge, and De Quincey. He says it's shamanic. That we may all seem to just be sitting there, staring at the screen, but really, some of us anyway, we're adventurers. We're out there, seeking, taking risks. In hope, he says, of bringing back wonders. (Gibson 32.3)

The passage emphasises merging with a system that begins to talk back. Put another way, a knot of interpreting subjects and the yet-to-fully-interpreted objects needs to be unravelled by some kind of mutuality between the two, some flattening of the topography on which subject and object are separate. It is a thing that must be dreamed "for subjects" by the author-maker so that s/he can "dream us," as Parkaboy suggests.

At that time and place, Cayce is "existing at some still point around which all else revolves" (Gibson 32.5), as if in this revelation of feeling, a decentred subject has become the central node of a matrix of sociality and signification. In this moment in which Cayce "inadvertently" sends out this bald expression of feeling and pre-conscious desire, she feels as though "something in park had made her do it" (Gibson 32.5). At the same time, sitting at the centre of this assemblage, the machine "acts for" Cayce, or at least, acts as a surrogate or scapegoat so that Cayce, the temporarily individual, sovereign subject can make a neat one-to-one link between her pure expression and the maker of the mysterious footage. It is a moment that reveals a great deal about the text's investment in

the notion of a complete subject—an idea that I will later argue operates in contradistinction to the novel's invocation of the rhizomatically a-referential footage.

The Footage

Could it be, then, that the “problem of the too-multivalent sign”—whether Cayce’s CPUs, the clues of her father’s whereabouts, or the footage as a gesture toward temporary a-referentiality—is what renders the solving of the footage’s mystery as the solution to Cayce’s condition? When news of a new segment arrives through a chance encounter, amongst Cayce’s first reactions as she is “getting a grip” is to say “no spoilers” (Gibson 3.4), as if having another hermeneutic frame placed between her subjectivity and the footage would be terrible. Indeed, she wants “each new fragment to impact as cleanly as possible” (Gibson 3.6), “thereby momentarily escaping the film or films that [one has] been assembling, consciously or unconsciously, since first exposure” (Gibson 3.6). The pattern recognition that is both a gift and a trap is a question of hermeneutics, and the mysterious sign for which a clear referent is not yet produced is forever impossibly overdetermined. As such, a paring down of possibilities is the only response. The attempt to exert a centripetal pressure on signification—itself an interesting inversion of the pressures discussed in relation to Ong and orality in chapter one—is expressed in both Cayce as perceiving subject and the footage itself. The couple in clip #135 exhibit a “timelessness,” in which “he might be a sailor in 1914, or a jazz musician entering a club in 1957” (Gibson 3.7), the seeming ahistoricism apparently quite deliberate. But it is exactly the question of referentiality and its possibility with which the footage and the text itself

seems to play. The unending scrutiny in which the fragments have “been endlessly collated, broken down, reassembled, by whole armies of fanatical investigators” (Gibson 3.7) is an attempt to structure and pin down interpretation to a set of recognizable parameters: history, geography, identity, fashion and so on.

However, the moment at which these two characters represented in the footage kiss, Cayce comes to “marvel ... at the perfect and now perfectly revealed extent of her present loneliness” (Gibson 3.8). This is to say that in the experience of what turns out to be a virtual, a-referential representation of romantic mutuality, Cayce comes to recognize what seems to be at once perfectly complete solitude and utter loneliness. The perfection of her self-recognition operates in relation to a set of signs with no corresponding material referent, which when reflected on an “empty bed” becomes a reminder of feeling alone. It is a remarkable moment in which a projection of a completed moment in a virtual mirror reveals a “split” self—i.e., one not in an assumed normative romantic attachment. Thus the footage and an implied telos are inextricably linked. In one sense, the footage is a common narrative mystery that must be solved; but in another, it is a solution-to-be that will also “solve” Cayce’s existential, social alienation. As Hollinger argues, “the couple in the footage exist in some other plane unmarked by history and are situated by the text as the signifier of both authenticity and immediacy” (464). If the text is constantly obsessed with movement and emphasizing the “deferral” of *différance*, then the footage offers a “stillness pervaded by presence” (Hollinger 465) that fixes and says “stop.”

Yet, if the footage can also clearly be read as “art”—which can obviously and often does operate through the absence of a *specific* material referent—then in what way might it be said to differ simply because it is digital art? A Jackson Pollock painting is also anti-referential, anti-significatory. It is a question that the text itself engages: as Boone Chu notes, “as to how blankness can yield an image... ultimately, that underlies the entire history of art” (Gibson 19.4). One way to enter the question is to point that, as Jameson notes, the footage takes the science fiction trope of an “unimaginable reality” and replaces it with “an (as yet) unimaginable aesthetic” (110). The footage is meant to be “a-referential”—a term I use to denote not a complete absence of signification, but of a simultaneous intermingling of referents in video footage that *presents* as “fully referential.” The footage is the video version of the photoshopped face so convincing that the viewer does not know it is “fake”—a once science-fictional phenomenon that, I should mention, has essentially become a reality in the comparatively short time it has taken to write this project.

Jameson suggests that “the problem, for the group forming around this artefact, as indeed for all group formation, is that of the contradiction between universality—in this case the universality of taste—and the particularity of this unique value that sets us off from all others and defines us in our collective specificity” (Jameson 111). Just *what* is the object the community forms around? It is a question that demands another, however: how does referentiality function in the text? Even before the reader learns the nature of the footage, the very question of referentiality makes it so mysterious. As Jameson argues:

the footage itself, whose absence of stylistic cues suggests a veritable Barthesian “white writing”. Indeed, it is rather this very contradiction which is the deeper subject of *Pattern Recognition*, which projects the Utopian anticipation of a new art premised on ‘semiotic neutrality’ and on the systematic effacement of names, dates, fashions and history itself, within a context irremediably corrupted by all of those things. (Jameson 111-112)

It is thus impossible to speak of the footage without the swirl of discourse around it, the very chatter itself building the footage. Furthermore, the narrative function of the footage is obviously far more than a commentary on signification. Inextricably linked to this notion of the footage is Cayce’s own existential angst, itself linked to manner in which centrifugal pressure on signification pins signs into history, the very thing that produces Cayce’s allergy or sensitivity. The narrator says that “the mystery of the footage often feels closer to the core of her life than Bigend, Blue Ant, Dorotea, even her career” (Gibson 8.5). The mystery speaks to an ongoing sense of incompleteness in Cayce, an unknowing “something watermarking the lower-right hand corner of her existence ... just beyond some periphery, beyond the physical, beyond vision, and it marks her as ... what?” (Gibson 7.7). As with Arjun, Jas and Jane, Cayce’s narrative trajectory is concerned with fixing an implied lack of wholeness. The significance for Cayce is highlighted by her friend Margot’s assertion about her affection for the footage: “it’s no name ... that’s why you like it. Isn’t it? Like your trademark thing” (Gibson 10.4). It is *this* a-referential blankness that draws Cayce to the footage: the “polyphonic” (Gibson 11.7) loneliness that Cayce feels watching the footage leads her to believe that there is no “recognized

filmmaker around who can do that” (Gibson 11.7), who can produces the “sense that it’s going somewhere, that something happen” (Gibson 11.7). The lack of either a completed object or a hermeneutic frame easily looped and sublated into existing ideological and aesthetic frames allows the footage to operate as a canvas for hope, the thing onto which projections of inarticulate completeness can be shown. Unlike the specific goals of Dorian, Arjun or Jas, however, the reader is at this point denied the shape of Cayce’s end goal, a fact which in itself is significant, as it is precisely this lack of a clear connection between initiating factor and telos that drives the narrative.

It bears asking, however, what sort of textual gesture is contained in the production of such space—and whether it is always forever to be only a textual gesture. One might argue that certain articulations of the divine—those in Descartes, for example—are always the inverse of particular notions: the in-finite, the perfectly good, and so on. Similarly, the a-referential, hermeneutically blank nature of the footage can be seen as a similar semantic and ideological loop in which a concept is predicated upon an absent idea in order to frame or reshape the subject interpellated by the structure itself. In order to think through these questions, it is necessary to look at the relationship between the footage and its author through digital referentiality.

The Silent Subject and Speaking Art

One way the tension of authorship is captured in the novel is in that which is generated between the “Progressives” and the “Compleatists,” who argue over whether the

work is a finished whole or an ongoing series. The distinction, however, seems secondary to the techno-fetishistic discourse that argues that:

this footage is generated single-handedly by some technologically empowered solo auteur, some guerrilla creator out there alone in the night of the Internet. That it might be being generated via some sort of CGI, actors, sets, and all, and entirely at the virtual hand of some secretive and perhaps unknown genius, has become a widespread obsession with a large faction of Progressive, and with many Completists as well. (Gibson 6.4)

Part of what becomes so important about the footage's blankness, then, is not just how it does or does not signify, but in how it interjects in a discourse that connects art-object and creator. As Bigend suggests, the footage is arguably part of a cultural transition in which it is "as though the creative process is no longer contained within an individual skull, if indeed it ever was. Everything, today, is to some extent the reflection of something else" (Gibson 7.10). It is not just referentiality that is stake, then, but what referentiality means to its relation to a subject. Implied here is that "individual skill" and creativity produce a one-to-one relationship between the author-subject and the art object, and that the footage "has been positioned, via the strategy, outside of that. You can assemble the segments, but you can't reassemble them" (Gibson 7.10). The footage is thus the art object that resists remixing,⁴¹ but also a neat, one-to-one relationship between thing created and creator. The maker must be found, but the assemblage of clips will also remain, in its very rhizomatic structure, a thing not able to be a finished, whole object. As a finished object, it is a whole to be pulled apart; as an incomplete assemblage,

it is a collection of fragments that, lacking a clear hermeneutic frame to posit it is a single object, cannot easily be put to other uses.

The creator(s) themselves, however, also seem to resist a neat, clean division into a single, authoritative, authorial subject. Nora and Stella communicate in their own language, through “Twin talk” (Gibson 35.5), a private language inaccessible to those not part of this mirrored pair. Nora’s face is “Stella’s face, but some fault bisects it vertically, not quite evenly” (Gibson 37.5), as if Nora is a reproduction of Stella, somehow subject to iterative *différance*, refracted ever so slightly by the act of the copy. It is as if reducing Nora to a single subject is too much—the author of film so resistant to signification and neat taxonomy must herself be resistant to the same mechanisms of understanding. For Nora, her past “seemed to cause her great pain,” so during her recovery, she uses the technology that is brought in “to edit. *Recut*” (Gibson 35.5, emphasis added). The process of editing is one of ruthless cutting, so much so that an entire sixteen-minute film is reduced “to a single frame” consisting of “a bird. In flight. Not even in focus” (Gibson 35.6). As Nora recovers, looking at the TV helps her focus, and “when the images were taken away, she began to die again” (Gibson 35.6). Interestingly, when given the ability to manipulate the images she sees, she again “had isolated a single figure” (Gibson 35.6), as if the random nature of her editing must always zero in on a mysterious focal point amongst a rhizomatic, a-linear network of possible foci. Yet, at the same time, the face of this man is then manipulated in Photoshop, which constitutes what Stella calls the beginning of the footage itself (Gibson 35.7). The referent is always decontextualized, then edited, shaped and morphed by technology to be stitched back into a whole that

both is and is not referential. Instead, quite specifically “it” occupies a liminal space between referring to a material thing, while making that chain of referentiality almost impossible to trace.

That Gibson “shrouds Nora’s aesthetic process within the black box of her brain... ultimately displaces her individual agency to the subpersonal realm” (Konstantinou 84). While Cayce’s gift involves pre-conscious intuition of how a sign will signify in relations of both cultural and commodity exchange, Nora’s concerns how the blank sign will spill out in (fictional) relations that supersede the relations that both bind and enable Cayce. Moreover, the production of Nora’s footage is also the inverse of the chain of production in Cayce’s work: the prison workers who process the footage are the “direct result of the mania of privatization” (Konstantinou 84) in Russia, a kind of industrialized production of the singular object, rather than the singular recognition of the single sign, that then spills out.

Forget Referents: Textual Resolution in the form of a Transcendent Signifier

Having begun to solve the mystery of the origin of the footage—here characterized as possibly being more important than “the meaning”—Cayce starts to feel as “she no longer is able to fit” her conception of herself into her present situation, as if now she finds “her life somewhere behind, like a room she’s stepped out of” (Gibson 36.2). The arrival at the end of a specific trajectory has reshaped Cayce’s idea of herself, as if the narrative of her life is Eliot’s literary canon and the footage mystery a dazzling, transformative new work.⁴² Significantly then, this realization is followed by

indeterminacy over “the Russian connection” at work, though for Cayce nothing seems “to click with linkage she’s trying to braille here” (Gibson 36.2). With Dorotea’s Russian bosses, Damien’s work in the country, or Baranov’s connections, the frame of a possible connection is there, as simultaneously “there must always be room for coincidence” (Gibson 36.2) lest Cayce descend into “apophenia, each thing then perceived as part of an overarching pattern of conspiracy” (Gibson 36.3).

The question it also raises, however, relates again to the structure of referentiality in art. The footage, as it stands, has no specific end. Jameson articulates it this way:

its utter lack of style is an ontological relief, like black-and-white film after the conventional orgies of bad technicolour, like the silence of solitude for the telepath whose mind is jammed with noisy voices all day long. The footage is an epoch of rest, an escape from the noisy commodities themselves, which turn out, as Marx always thought they would, to be living entities preying on the humans who have to coexist with them. Unlike the footage, however, Gibson’s novel gives us the homeopathy rather than antidote. (114)

The footage is, according to the text, thus “another world. It is always another world” (Gibson 37.7). In this sense, the footage is *art*, but art conceived as a distinct fictional space, as one might talk about the “world of the text” or how, in transmedia, one might speak of the fictional world of a particular series—it is the sense of the mimetic as a field unto itself. What is different about the footage, however, seems to rest on two key points: its production through the use of digital technology such that its referential status exists in a liminal space; and the digital nature of its reproduction and dissemination.

To the first, each segment is part of an unfinished, ongoing narrative—though this term must be used loosely—in which fragmented “mere scraps of found video” (Gibson 37.5) are stitched together into an aesthetic whole in which the constituent parts are impossible to connect to a referent. As an ongoing scene—i.e. as video—it produces the effect of referentiality while belying the possibility of such. Each micro-fragment is “chosen ... by the roving, darting cursor” (Gibson 37.5) to then find its way “to one of Nora’s subsidiary screens” (Gibson 37.5) on which these parts are then put together. What does it then say that the footage, which to Cayce is a mystery, “something hidden at the heart of the world” (Gibson 37.7), is both of and not of the world—or rather that it performs referentiality as it belies reference? After all, what is clear from Cayce’s “gift/affliction” is that is a reaction to an overdetermined chain of production, and therefore to signification, such as is highlighted by her severe reaction to Tommy Hilfiger. It is the “distance” in an assumed authentic chain, the signifiatory expansion of the sign, that upsets the chain of author/producer and product to a chain of signification in which the commodity as signifier not only has a clear signified, but a clear link to the referent, too. The Rickson’s jacket signifies as a pure marker of authorship and craftsmanship because of an “uncomplicated” position of a cultural field of signifiers, but it is bestowed such status because of the clear link between its production and the object, unmediated as it is by marketing, cultural chatter and so on.

The footage, however, paradoxically occupies both sides of this chain of signification. Resistant as it is to narrative coherence, it cannot simply be bound up in or sublated into pre-existent modes of interpretation by way of ideology, as a Tommy

Hilfiger can. Rather than a narrative that “signifies,” the footage is a blank locus, a canvas for the production of interpretation. The reader can see as much in the parallels drawn between the dual mysteries of the footage and the fate of Win Pollard. At the same time, the very blankness of the footage in the text is eventually created by the singular focus of its creation as an act and salvation, catharsis and aesthetic expression. To wit, the footage is what Cayce has always been searching for because it both is and is not an answer. It is a structure with meaning, but only because of the structure of the form; its content does not hold the meaning Cayce desires. That the footage is so sought after by Bigend is a fact of its dissemination, not its content—or rather, how the blankness of its content fuels its dissemination. Further complicating things is that another contradiction lies at the core of the footage as cultural artefact: “the system created to assure the security of the Volkovas [i.e. the maker] was about a rigid secrecy, and the mechanism to make the work public was not” (Gibson 41.5). To wit, the a-referential structure of the footage and the constant trace-chains of signification on the internet as distribution mechanism are constantly in tension. By extension, signification in the text is also in tension with not only capitalist overdetermination in a process of de- and reterritorialization related to economic motives, but also about the holographic nature of certain objects: that they flicker in and out of *apparent* solidity, gesturing to the space between frames in their flickering.

When Cayce awakes after having been drugged, she is clearly again in a liminal space, as she appeared to be at the beginning of the text. She starts to “wonder whether this might not be Siberia” (Gibson 39.6) but is unsure because the place “looks more like

her idea of the Australian outback” (Gibson 39.6). Displaced and wondering if there were “still people in the world who wouldn’t recognize” (Gibson 39.6) the sound a jet plane, Cayce is entering an inverse liminal state in which she now dreams of “two towers of light ... [that] aren’t like the memorial display from London, but like the towers of her dream” (Gibson 39.7). In this state Cayce somehow comes to grips with the loss of her father, who also appears as a hallucination. When Cayce is then found by Parkaboy, the helicopter’s “long white beam of light sweeping the dead ground” (Gibson 37.8) articulates Cayce’s own searching and yearning for a conclusion to her desire for answers about the footage and her grief. The light, after all, is described as “like a lighthouse gone mad from loneliness, and searching that barren ground as foolishly, as *randomly*, as any grieving heart ever has” (Gibson 38.8, my emphasis). The image sets up—or perhaps cements—a clear contrast in Cayce’s two parallel searches: for the footage, which has a clear, if complex and contradictory, set of answers; and for her father, which has no answer but for the inevitable fact of an absence.

The tension between randomness, meaning, and Cayce’s gift is something that Konstantinou describes as “basically incoherent with the novel” (81). To wit, “the novel’s improbably happy ending ... highlights the fact that her sensitivity ultimately plays little role in helping her find the creator of the footage” (Konstantinou 81). But what Konstantinou’s reading perhaps elides is that Cayce’s gift is for where the sign will fit within a social context; the footage “works” because it does not fit in that manner—and therefore “works.” The mystery of the narrative is one with unclear, multiple answers: the surveillance to which Cayce was subject was *both* the Russian, ex-KGB machine of Volkov,

but also Dorotea acting as an extension of the former group, with her own methods (Gibson 41.8). They both are and are not linked, both part of the same network and not. Furthermore, Cayce realizes that “as Win had taught her, the actual conspiracy is not so often about us; we are most often the merest of cogs in larger plans” (Gibson 41.9). The same indeterminacy of meaning runs through the final chapter of the text. To Magda, Volkov is just “some Russian oil magnate” (Gibson 43.1) who is “surprisingly cultured, a sort of Saatchi-like patron figure, nothing nouveau riche or mafia” (Gibson 43.1-43.2). Similarly, her mother is convinced the clarity of information about Win means that “obviously [Cayce] must have had help from [her] father” (Gibson 43.2), retaining her previous interpretation of not only the events that led to his death, but his spectral presence, too.

The text thus resolves by “making Cayce whole,” but in an odd way. The two mysteries of her father and the footage are solved in terms of their structure: an outline that gives an appropriately blank space in relation to which Cayce can orient herself. The legibility of form, but not specific content, speaks to a formal, epistemological shift in which a flattening occurs, rendering the ground of signification of subjects and objects as a space to be written upon, rather than read. Yet, because the text is so invested in providing resolution, it must close off this open-ended signification and its relation to its technological grounds. At the end of the narrative, Cayce “still has the iBook but never uses it for mail” (Gibson 43.4). It is now a tool disconnected from the broader matrix of the internet. It all occurs in a chapter called “Mail,” in which the majority of characters communicate with Cayce through text, as disembodied representations of themselves

functioning as signs of identity. Contradictorily, however, it is Cayce the reading subject who apprehends these notes “fully.” How else is one to read a text framed as it is by sleep, when it ends with the line: “she kisses his sleeping back and falls asleep” (Gibson 43.6)? It is a textual expression of an incompatibility: between Cayce’s need for a chain of signification that ends and the impossibility of such, a phenomenon exacerbated by the digital multiplication of both signs and grounds of signification. As such, the text runs together two fundamentally different ideas of the subject, a contradiction that can be read in terms of an Althusserian dichotomy between being both “subject of” and “subject to.” Cayce is the subject-of a pattern of apophenia that eventually resolves into a kind of meaning; Nora, responsible for Cayce’s “healing” is subject-to the shifting system of signification that allows documentary footage to be re-purposed so as certain signs can be reconfigured to have different—or simply no—referent. The vision of a subject one is left with is therefore twofold—sovereign and conduit.

To put it one way, then, *Pattern Recognition* “doesn’t go far enough”—at least in the terms of my project. What it does instead in that “failure”—though I do not use the term in an evaluative sense—is approach the limits of referentiality, epistemology, and digitality. To wit, while the footage opens up a complex relationship to referentiality and what can be known, the text still searches for and *finds* a “real,” one that not only satisfies the text’s protagonist, but also a reader’s desire for completion. Cayce is, at the end of the narrative, not only “who she is” but also seemingly happy as such. Cayce’s relation to a holographic field is one that is ultimately cast off, but not in the same manner as in *Londonstani*; rather, it is cast off so as to also discard the holographic self as relation,

instead positing a notion of a subject that can return to a bodily, non-networked completeness. What desire there was in the text for a self that exceeds its positioning—for a self that cannot be captured in the semiotic grid of signs that constitute its identity—is eventually abandoned. I argue, then, that the text pushes up against the boundaries of what digitality may do to signification, only to retreat in favour of not only narrative closure, but also a closure to signification. In doing so, the text also lays out a contradiction between an “end” to the chain of signification, and no end or closure at all—as if, in the impossibility of fully grappling with the tension of the text’s playing with signification, it expresses the limits of referentiality in the terms of a contradiction.

In my estimation, a significant response to digitality’s effect on the subject is performed in Teju Cole’s *Open City*, by barely mentioning digital technology at all. What it does most differently and fruitfully is to engage a lack of closure—not simply in a manner that provides “an open-ended narrative,” but instead asks that the reader locate the protagonist’s identity in the *movement* between its various instantiations. It is that flux of expressions of identity, flickering in and out of sight, that most clearly highlights both the difficulty locating the self as a process of movement, but also that the relational, arguably holographic structure between those expressions of self can *only* be understood as a movement, rather than a unitary or fixed concept.

A City Altogether Too Open?

Teju Cole’s 2011 work *Open City* is a text concerned with the both the reading and writing of a subject-as-text. As such, while the other textual pairings in this project have

been explicitly about a contrast meant to emphasize some specific ideas about digitality and subjectivity, my analysis of *Open City* is instead meant to situate a contemporary novel's approach to subjectivity and identity as part of a broader historical moment that cannot simply be attributed to "digital technology," but also importantly cannot be divorced from it either. Furthermore, while the comparison of, for example, *Transmission* and *Jane Eyre*, was meant to highlight significant historical and technological differences in the horizon of self-projection, with *Pattern Recognition* and *Open City*, my aim is not necessarily to analyse a series of differences so much as to think how the latter can be read as an "effect" of the ideas of the former. In engaging an analysis of the construction of the novel's protagonist Julius, I aim to highlight the meta-textual performative production of an identity that resists notions of wholeness, completeness—and, ultimately, in troubling a fixed relation between the collection of signs that produces the phenomenal experience of a subject and the notion of an inner identity, produces that lack of closure as a subject-in-flux. If in *Londonstani* the desire for a post-positionality self was about race, and in *Transmission*, about the Idea as an escapist, abstract plane, then in *Open City* there is a desire for a subject that moves from both its marking by trauma and the subject's own acts that produce trauma; as such what the novel wishes to exceed is not identity as such, as much as it is identity as a thing subsumed by the singularity of a solitary taxonomic or hermeneutic marker. If in earlier chapters, the holographic self was a relation between a bodily subject and a holographic projection expressing a desire to move beyond that, then in *Open City* the holographic self folds in on itself, becoming an

ongoing relationality between multiple differing expressions of self that exist in a flattened matrix of connections.

Julius is always a multiplied object, firstly and obviously to the reader as a textual construction, but secondly as always a subject experiencing himself as an object, situated amongst other objects located in global discursive and ideological networks. The holographic self, I have argued, is an analytic concept meant to understand selfhood in relation to the presence or logic of multiple spatio-temporal sites of subjectivity as they exist in relation to each other and online. The holographic self is thus my model for digital subjectivity as always being about a relation, and one that I have argued that is not *inherently* novel itself, yet the dynamics of which are inflected differently by the spatio-temporal qualities of the digital. As such, the non-linear structure of the text in its psycho-geographic representation of Julius's world not only collapses the distinction between subject and object, flattening a horizon of signs such that ethical and ideological assertions about Julius "the subject" are rendered always-already multiple, contradictory, non-static, but it also renders Julius as the constant movement between these expressions, making Massumi's "movement-vision" a particularly useful lens to think through the character's identity. Furthermore, and in contradistinction to the other novels in this project, Julius's trajectory in the text is an entirely internal "teleology," such that the arrival at the text's end is not a resolution of character as it is with Jas, Arjun and Cayce; it is instead, the representation of a constellation of subjectivities that resists a narrative of locating the self in either a singular spatio-temporal instantiation, or at a fixed point on a horizon of ethical or ideological systems. In doing so, the text forms

Julius as an intriguing expression of a holographic self such that the notion moves away from phantasy toward a rhizomatic self-relation within which a desire to exceed a singular identity is captured in the narrativization of a subject that resists singularity precisely “in movement.” Rather than a specifically “digital” self, Julius crystallizes the concerns of this project: that the Web and digitality are part of the networks that produce a kind of post-internet subjectivity which reconfigures that ground of positionality in the unfixed and in-motion dispersal of identity across numerous spatio-temporal expressions.

In order to argue this point more clearly, however, I think it is necessary to first examine digitality’s potential effect on signification—an idea that has been explored fruitfully by Katherine Hayles in *How to be Posthuman*—and then to inquire as to the limits of signification in relation to identity. Early in that Hayles text, she argues that “new models of subjectivity emerging from such fields as cognitive science and artificial life [and web studies] imply that even a biologically unaltered *Homo Sapiens* counts as posthuman. The defining characteristics involve the construction of subjectivity, not the presence of nonbiological components” (4). What is particularly intriguing about Hayles’s approach to digitality’s effect on “the construction of subjectivity” is its reliance upon rethinking the sign. Referring to the difference in interacting with language on screens, Hayles suggests that digital writing inspires a signifier that, rather than simply slipping, “flickers”:

The relation between striking a key and producing text with a computer is very different from the relation achieved with a typewriter. Display brightness is

unrelated to keystroke pressure, and striking a single key can effect massive changes in the entire text. The computer restores and heightens the sense of word as image—an image drawn in a medium as fluid and changeable as water... As I work with the text-as-flickering-image, I instantiate within my body the habitual patterns of movement that make pattern and randomness more real, more relevant, and more powerful than presence and absence.” (Hayles 26)

The inversion of an emphasis upon the presence of the signifier—or, in the case of this project, the body-as-signifier—has specific effects on how one might conceive of the subject as a physical entity “experienced” through visual, aural, and other forms of perception. In *How We Became Posthuman*, Hayles refers often to virtual reality—the technology in which a user’s senses are immersed by means of a helmet with a screen and speakers; yet her approach is still useful given the way in which digital technology, as I argued in the introduction, is a field for self-representation and the exchange of both sociality and capital. As such, referring to that subsumption of the senses into a cyborg realm in which the self is both bodily and (digitally) virtual, Hayles suggests:

Questions about presence and absence do not yield much leverage in this situation, for the avatar both is and is not present, just as the user both is and is not inside the screen. Instead, the focus shifts to questions about pattern and randomness. What transformations govern the connections between user and avatar? What parameters control the construction of the screen world? What patterns can the user discover through interaction with the system? Where do

these patterns fade into randomness? What stimuli cannot be encoded within the system and therefore exist only as extraneous noise? When and how does this noise coalesce into pattern? (Hayles 27)

What becomes especially interesting about this approach is that a relationship is established between a doubled sense of the signifier and the subject. As Poster argues, “the rational individual or centered subject show[s that] imagined autonomy is associated with a capacity to link sign and referent, word and thing, in short, a representational function of language” (15). What Hayles is suggesting is somewhat different, instead arguing that “in informatics, the signifier can no longer be understood as a single marker, for example an ink mark on a page” (31). This is meant in quite a different sense from a notion that a single signifier can have multiple signifieds, even simultaneously. Referring to the multiple systems of code involved in writing on a computer—of human language, but also the signal of a key being pressed, specific pulses translated in the kernel of an operating system and so on up the chain—Hayles’s argument is thus that writing is subject to a multiple expansion of systems of signification, particularly because “the constant reproduced through multiple coding layers is a pattern rather than a presence” (31). Rather than the discursive or ideological multiplicity implied by Lacan or Derrida in the explosion of the stable sign, Hayles adds to the idea of signification by positing multiple codes of signification contained within the sign—and ultimately suggests that the multiplicity is grounded by the phenomenal experience of the flickering sign itself. It is not the flickering signifier thus escapes a logic of signification; rather, it simultaneously registers in mutually incompatible systems of signification, expanding on the multiple

valence of the sign by adding in or supplementing the logic of code, and the behaviours contained therein. A word might signify multiply, but also, within a given programmatic arrangement, might also trigger an action that might release a cascade of code. The flickering signifier simultaneously operates on different orders of internally-interdependent systems that are neither mutually legible or translatable.

Asserting Hayles's view as gospel, or arguing over whether her approach is truly new—rather than simply an additional layer in the always multiple systems of code that determine our relationship to language or thought—is less important, however, than recognizing the idea of the mediation of language through a generative form of code, a situation that results in a doubled phenomenon in the absence of a signified-as-a-thing-in-itself that is forever mediated by a system reliant of patterns, but that also produces randomness. To wit, if Lacan troubled the signified-signifier relationship, then informatics troubles that troubling, so to speak. Hayles argues that these layered systems of signification—for example, of a system called “English” and one called “HTML or CSS”—enable systemic mutations, “the bifurcation point at which the interplay between pattern and randomness cause the system to evolve in a new direction” (33).

Yet, at the same time as Hayles places this emphasis upon the flickering signifier, my earlier invocation of Massumi presents something of a problem. Massumi's argument is that the semiotic positioning of the subject can often elide the movement between expressions of self legible within sign systems. To phrase it in terms of *Pattern Recognition*, Massumi's point is not that Nora's footage doubles or multiplies the sign, but

that the ground of a more useful analysis is the parallax production of what one might call signs-as-anchors for the signifiatory *movement between* them. It is the near-inarticulable interstitial spaces—the thing that is always itself-slipping-into-not-itself through the sheer passage of time—that need focus. As Massumi puts it, “the continuity of movement-vision is an *included disjunction*” (51, original emphasis).

I thus argue that the doubled presence of both a bodily subject and a digital virtual self-representation demands a different mechanism of not just “reading the body” as a marker of identity, but reading the subject-as-digital-literary-construct, too. As such, the conflation between subject and (self) object that I argue occurs in *Open City* is expressive of this difference, specifically in its desire to position the subject as a spatio-temporal movement between these expressions, rather than aiming for *either* an expression of true self—as might be said of Jane in *Jane Eyre*—or for a desire for an “impossible” thing, such as in *Londonstani* or *Transmission*. This flattening and motion is itself indirectly expressive of the socio-historical phenomenon of the web as a medium in which subjectivity is radically and vastly more commonly mediated as not only a series of objects and signs, but also the movement between these signs-of-self as various, competing, and complementary expressions of self. If in the example of SNS *Shox*, which I discussed in chapter one, I suggested that is not that the “truth of self” is found in either the body or the self-representation, but in their overlap. In this chapter, I would like to modify the idea to invoke a movement amongst that flattened relation, which I would suggest finds phenomenal ground in the replication of such movement amongst the socio-historical phenomenon of social networking itself. As such, in mapping out of

movement in relationality of self to self-representation, and in addition to being an intricate, complex meditation of dislocation and identity, *Open City* performs not only the experience of apprehending subjectivity through “media-mediated” signs, but also engages the ethical implications of such in which the location of Julius amongst a global network of relations *and* self-relation performs the logic of the social, digital virtual through narrativization. It is the relational, matrix-like arrangement of Julius as a textual construction that performs a logic of not only one aspect of the holographic self, but digitality in relation to subjectivity as well.

Obviously, there is a legitimate question to be asked as to how and why *Open City* might be said to performatively expressive a historico-epistemological moment “more” than other texts. After all, the literary character and the novel are *always* performative productions of identities-as-collections-of-signs. My point, however, is not that the actual performative dimension of *Open City* is unique, or that Julius’s movement through the text is simply always doubled, such that Julius reflects on Julius; it is that the novel arrives at a point where the only option for the reader is a spatio-temporally multiplied vision of the subject that is the fundamental and perhaps only epistemological difference rendered by digitality. Again, turning to Hayles, “the contemporary pressure toward dematerialization, understood as an epistemic shift toward pattern/randomness and away from presence/absence, affects human and textual bodies on two levels at once, as a change in the body (the material substrate) and as a change in the message (the codes of representation). The connectivity between these changes is, as they say in the computer industry, massively parallel and highly interdigitated” (29). As character and literary

construct, Julius operates in a manner such that his doubly suspended depiction of a subject always operating in relation to a subject-as object brings us full circle from Descartes considering his own self. To put it in Hayles's terms, Julius is not so much the flickering signifier as *the flickering subject*, the manifestation of a system of bodily signification that is always going to register in two spatio-temporal and semiotic fields at once. The key difference, however, between this persistent fact of subjectivity in the abstract and the present is that the spatio-temporal multiplication of self finds broad phenomenal ground in digital technology such that the novel becomes an exemplary expression of this difference—and thus why Julius, in the terms of this project, the rhizomatic construction of the holographic self.

Rhizomatic Temporality

The opening of *Open City* is classically *in medias res*. The first sentence that begins “And so when I began to go on evening walks last fall” (Cole 3) not only invokes a conversational tone between reader and narrator, it also grounds the text in a specific, arguably rhizomatic, model of temporality. The reader enters into Julius's “aimless wandering” (Cole 3), both literally and figuratively in terms of the narrative, and finds herself at the beginning of a process in which “New York City worked itself into [Julius's] life at walking pace” (Cole 3). He is in movement, constantly in the text: not only spatially through walking, but also temporally, in that the narrative jumps back and forth through time. The introduction is a doubled entrance, of the city into Julius's consciousness and the reader's into Julius's mind, and each happen in a manner that

seems to refute linear origins in favour of moving into the stream already in process. Such doubling is heightened by the image of bird migrations, which are not only cyclical, but for Julius also conjure questions of how “our life below might look from their perspective” (Cole 3), the inverted view already resisting the primacy of the internal, subjective consciousness as the only, “true” viewpoint. The holographic self of the rhizome is constantly *going somewhere*.

Such non-hierarchal, non-linearity seems central to the text, particularly in terms of the inevitable implications of globalism. Far before the text gets to Julius’s own global past, however, one is presented with the image of “Internet stations from Canada, Germany, or the Netherlands” (Cole 4) and “the murmur of their announcers, the sounds of those voices speaking calmly from thousands of miles away” (Cole 4). Initially, it presents the obvious phenomenal reality of being able to access media from anywhere, in the simple sense of a shrinking world. But to Julius it also “wasn’t at all difficult to draw the comparison between [himself]... and the radio host in his or her booth, during what must have been the middle of the night somewhere in Europe” (Cole 5). At the outset then, there is already a spatio-temporal collapse, an image of a world in which consciousness becomes the central locus for a global network of information transmission. It seems significant, particularly when one considers that “those disembodied voices remain connected in [Julius’s] mind ... with the apparition of migrating geese” (Cole 5). It is the image of the globalised world of text, in which the mind is indivisibly part of global networks of exchange and is constant movement between discursively constructed worlds that are the products of technologically

mediated fields of experience. As Hamish Dalley notes, “Julius resists all attempts to fix him[self] to a stable spatio-temporal location” (19). Such resistance is the logic of the holographic self that I have taken such pains to articulate: that the self exists in relation to technologically-mediated modes of existence that collapses spatio-temporal distinctions into a network of subjectivity that operates in the flux between specific expression of self, society, history.

Within such a framework, the narrator—or Cole himself—offers up a note about the process of reading itself, a noteworthy metatextual moment. The text first focuses upon the phenomenon of reading “without sounding out the words” (Cole 5) and then states that “a book suggests a conversation, one person speaking to another” (Cole 5). This brief paragraph in the novel sets two things in motion: first is the “interiority” of the space produced in the act of (silently) reading a novel; second is the meta-textual move of highlighting the constructed, performative conversation between narrator and reader. These two not only produce “the work,” but also establish a rapport or relationship between narrator and reader, a fact that becomes particularly poignant when the text peels back Julius’s past. The novel itself takes a non-linear approach to narrative. Though the text starts in “the present” of its diegetic world, it moves often without signal back and forth through time. Chapter “Two” starts with Julius still in a relationship with Nadège. “Five” also moves back. The start of “Ten” jumps back falsely in a dream. In structure and how the reader is introduced to the text, a series of connections is made between non-linearity, global networks of exchange and their position and function

within a self-reflexive literary narrative in which the subject operates in a subjective, historical, and ethical flux between all the aforementioned fields.

A Text of Internal Collapse

Cole's novel is one in which "the usual" post-postmodern critique occurs—of structure, of meaning as a linear accumulation, of the transparent subject, and so on. What is interesting, however, is how the text expresses the socio-material context of what I am referring to irreverently as the expected critique. Early on in the text, a traditional record store, soon to shut, is full of "middle-aged men ... going through the CD bins with something of the persistence of grazing animals" (Cole 16). The image clearly evokes the historical transition between the dominance of physical and digital media respectively. It is explicitly connected in the text to the Blockbuster video store, whose "business model had been fatally damaged" (Cole 19). That Julius is struck by "the swiftness and dispassion with which the market swallowed even the most resilient enterprises" (Cole 19) helps to set the novel up as itself being part of historical transition in which one must deal with "unforeseen changes" (Cole 19). Interestingly, however, when Julius is lost in a Mahler symphony at the record store, he is almost securely "swaddled in a private darkness," until, when the song shifts to a "stronger, surer mood" (Cole 17), he finds it impossible "to enter the music fully ... in that public place" (Cole 17). Julius's desire for an interior experience of art is made clear when, nonetheless, the song follows Julius home, falling over his "activities for the entirety of the following day" (Cole 17), and his daily routine "somehow seemed a part of that intricate musical world" (Cole 18). The music that was

once located at a space now simply “follows Julius around,” and though there is no mention at all of an iPod, there is a seeming analogy between machine-as-memory and ubiquitous access to music. The symphony becomes an indivisible part of Julius’s experience of the day, and it is a phenomenon accompanied by a collapse of public and private.

Open City is a text in which delimited boundaries and dichotomies are often performatively collapsed as a stylistic manifestation of the epistemologies that run criss-cross through the text. Such conflation, I argue, is key to the notion of a holographic self, because it is precisely in the collapse of the body that one finds a flattened arrangement of self-as-constellation. There are four major “fields of conflation”: of inner and outer in relation to subjectivity; the temporal; the spatial, particularly as a result of globalisation; and finally, most importantly, between subject and object. As such, the collapse of interior and exterior becomes a motif in the text. Julius’s and Nadège’s breakup is linked to the Take Back the Night March, Nadège’s “diminished voice” (Cole 24) positioned as an inverse of the strong, martial, feminist protest. Julius’s reaction to the film *The Last King of Scotland* is framed by a series of hermeneutic systems that are intricately related to Julius’s conception of himself. The first, is a “mood in the society that pushed people more toward snap judgements and unexamined opinions” (Cole 28) that Julius clearly dislikes. The second is the makeup of the theatre audience, who were “young, many of them black” (Cole 27) and missing the “white-haired white people” of a previous viewing. Third is the recollection of the party where the South Asian Dr. Gupta states that “when I think about Africans, I want to spit” (Cole 30), which interpellates Julius, “the only other

African in the room” (Cole 30-31), in a specific, involuntary, and unwanted fashion. Finally there is an event after the film in which Julius is harassed by two children who are almost puzzled by the fact that “he’s black ... but he’s not dressed like a gangster” (Cole 32) and who flashed their “idea of gang signs” (Cole 32). There is a consistent dynamic of Julius being seen and read in particular ways, while simultaneously he positions himself in relation to the exterior context, all of which serves to underline the text’s operation in relation to aforementioned confluences—as well as the movement between the grid-like markers of identity that seek to pin Julius in a particular place, identity, or subjective expression. In the frame of the text, the constant pattern of pairing moments and reflections in productive contrast becomes the stylistic basis of the novel, as a series of productive comparisons work to perform two functions: first, they make up the formal frame of the text; but secondly, they foreground a comparative dialectic between pairings of objects, be they physical or discursive, as the only mode of apprehending multiply valent, *unfixed* moments of interpretation.

One such example is the deployment of Yoruba mythology in the narrative, as it seems to collapse the global-cultural issues of migration into the same hermeneutic frame. Julius’s invocation of Oblata’s creation of damaged, drinking humans (25) are, after all, interpretive lenses, thought of after Julius sees and is not quite able to deal with a blind man navigating a train station. It “overlays”—which I’ve put in quotation marks to denote that there is no pure state from which to see—an other-system of seeing onto New York as a matter of course, its existence in the narrative not differing at all from, for example, Julius using his medical training to approach a situation. It collapses global

spatial, historical, and cultural difference into the same frame, a phenomenon that I suggest is key to understanding not only the text's understanding of the subject, but of its broader politics as well.

A Psycho-Geography of Trauma

The emphasis upon metaphorical pairings as explanatory frames finds its most obvious expression in Julius's walks, which work to foreground Julius as the text's locus for the collapse of historico-geographic contexts, as the text constructs Julius as both subject to this trauma of history while producing his own history of trauma, too. Fittingly, after Julius's early walks, he "rehearsed in the dark the numerous incidents and sights" (Cole 6) he witnessed, "sorting each encounter like a child playing with wooden blocks, trying to figure out which belonged where, which responded to which" (Cole 6). It is a contrast of unstructured space and a mind which attempts to put things in order—something that is inevitably seen as a "futile task" (Cole 7). In fact, the streets are seen as "welcome opposite" (Cole 7) to structure, organization, and linearity. These geographic areas are often ambivalent and thus difficult to read. When a blizzard arrives in the city, it "erased the most obvious signs of the times, leaving one unable to guess which century it was" (Cole 36). In typical style for the novel, the snow foreshadows Julius's visit to a museum, a space within which history also collapses into the same field. The space is organized into floors, and for a time Julius is standing at the window on the third floor looking outside, again at a liminal mid-point between interior and exterior. But most obvious in this scene is the radical interiority that Julius moves into, his own thought a

mirror of the deaf painter Brewster, whose “deafness made him an outsider” (Cole 39), as Julius stands “alone in that gallery, when the private world of the artist was total in its quietness” (Cole 38). In the stillness of an empty gallery filled with paintings from an aurally isolated artist, it is “as if all the time between them and [Julius] had somehow vanished” (Cole 40) and that upon leaving Julius had “the feeling of someone who had returned to the earth from a great distance” (Cole 40). The text overlaps both geography and temporality to produce spaces in which the present and past collapse into the same hermeneutic frame, despite the obvious incompatibility of the contexts. Julius’s subsequent use of “my brother” (Cole 40) to an ostensibly black cab driver provokes an angry, but silent, response. As frames of understanding collapse into the same spatio-temporal frame, the possibility of mutual sameness—or the kind of self-sameness of racial unity—becomes impossible. Julius’s response to the encounter was that he was in “no mood for people who tried to lay claims on [him]” (Cole 40), even though it was arguably Julius who did so. It conflates the subject and object of the moment, confusing who is doing what to whom. The blurring of lines is echoed later, when Julius runs into Kenneth, the guard from the museum, and thinks that “Kenneth was making a similar claim... [to be] African just like you” (Cole 53). The phenomenon positions Julius as a kind of “flickering subject,” always operating in relation to a variety of code systems all at once. As Dalley argues:

Julius, the protagonist of *Open City*, strongly resists the pressures of collective identification, objecting to the belief that accidents of birth, race, or family should entail ethical obligations. He refuses to engage in the negotiations of local,

national, and transnational affiliations that shape Kingsley's social self-positioning. He is instead ambivalently located between identity markers, not so much seeking to integrate various ties than exploiting their nonalignment to open a space for individual freedom. (25)

There are points on a grid, and nodes both in and on a matrix; and Julius skitters along between them, always refusing identification in favour of movement between points of identification.

The intermingling and mixture that runs through the text extends to the historico-geographic. During Julius's many movements through the city, he comes up from Wall Street subway station to find himself at a church, the graveyard of which houses Alexander Hamilton, "John Jacob Astor, Robert Fulton, and the abolitionist George Templeton Strong, whose memoirs of late-nineteenth-century life in the city [Julius] had seen on [his] friend's shelves" (Cole 49). It is just one of many moments in the novel in which Julius's horizontal criss-crossing of the city meets a vertical history, so that the geography of the city is always a geography of history too. It is an overlapping that takes on particular resonance in the image of beached white whales, or the "fifty-four-foot sperm whale" that "had entered into the legend of a nation at the very beginning of its modern history" (Cole 51), clearly evocative of *Moby Dick*. The image is of the city "built up, in concrete and stone" (Cole 54) which is cut through with rivers "like an embarrassing secret" (Cole 54). Perhaps more importantly, this sense of "what runs through and beneath" results in a situation in which "each of one those past moments was present now as a trace" (Cole 54).

Such a sense of history maps out traumas of the past, maybe most significantly in the “livid vein drawn across the neck of 9/11” (Cole 58). Such narratives of atrocity, layered atop each other are a “late contribution” (Cole 58), the “absence of bodies” (Cole 58) becoming another sort of trace. Thus, at Ground Zero, Julius notes that the missing “depiction of dead bodies” (Cole 58) was not the “first erasure on the site” (Cole 58), and then goes on to list the past of “Robinson Street, Laurens Street, College Place ... The old Washington Market, the active piers, the fishwives ... The Syrians, The Lebanese” (Cole 59) and the “communities here before Columbus ever set sail” (59). Later in the text, near Church Street, there is an inconspicuous “curious shape” (Cole 221) that houses a “memorial for the site of an African burial ground” (Cole 221) where, “into this earth had been interred the bodies of some fifteen to twenty thousand blacks” (Cole 221). The choice of “interred” points to the entrapment of both the bodies and the past, the manner in which “the land had been built over and the people of the city had forgotten that it was a burial ground” (Cole 220).

Clearly, then, in *Open City* and Julius’s psychogeographic walks, there is always “the echo across centuries... of slavery in New York” (Cole 221). Fittingly, when Julius reaches to pick something up from the ground, the narrator states that “a pain shot through the back of my left hand” (Cole 222), as if the historical psychic trauma and the physical trauma of Julius’s assault inextricably intermingle. Here and elsewhere in the text, history and geography, the personal the political, the visible and the unseen, meet in a series of three dimensional orthogonal axes. “By walking through the city,” Hamish Dalley writes, “Julius maps time onto space, so that history emerges less as an unfolding

sequence of events than as material traces inscribed on the physical environment” (27). The streets become “a palimpsest, as was all the city, written, erased, rewritten” (Cole 59). It is an image of the both urban space and the subject’s confrontation with history as one in which a series of different contexts collapse into the same spatio-temporal arena. Importantly, Julius is only “one of the still *legible* crowd” (Cole 59, my emphasis), themselves part of “generations rushed through the eye of the needle” (Cole 59). “Julius,” the textual construct, is not simply uniquely attuned to this layering; rather, he is always part of this ongoing relation of legibility, taxonomy and erasure, simply looking to “find the line that connected [him] to [his] own part in these stories” (Cole 59). Julius’s indeterminacy is akin to the notion of a floating signifier “searching” for the semiotic or epistemological system that would register it “properly,” and this indeterminacy of hermeneutic contexts is key to a reading of the novel; for it is in this indeterminacy that one not only conveniently finds “movement-vision,” but also the text’s concept of the subject as, rather than in, narrative flux.

The model of the subject’s position in both space and time here is one of an always-already socially and historically constituted self, yet also non-linear—as if the historical frame of positioning a subject collapses into the same body, just as John the Baptist and Elijah are “two individuals separated in time and vibrating in a singular frequency” (Cole 61). A similar connection between disparate but connected individuals is found in the tale of Saidu’s *émigré* dreams before being stuck in deportation limbo. The tale links yet distances Julius from a particular sort of history. On the one hand is Julius’s own self image as “the compassionate African who paid attention to the details of

someone else's life and struggle" (Cole 70). On the other is Saidu's treatment as *persona non grata*, who quickly has his hopes dashed when he arrives in America and is soon placed under arrest. This performance of linkage and disjuncture hearkens to a moment in the text where this incessant layering and collapse becomes even more pronounced. The simple descriptions of a shoe shine station in which it "felt ridiculous to mount the elevated chairs in the shops and have someone kneel before [one]" (Cole 71) invokes a history of oppressive power relations, particularly since the narrator describes the shoeshiner—himself once a servant in Haiti—as a "bootblack," suggesting the "older term seemed right for him" (Cole 71). Julius emerges as the privileged black male getting his shoes shined, yet part of a web of history that includes the ongoing American conflict in the Arab region, not to mention America's colonial relationship with parts of the Caribbean. Dalley suggests that the incident makes "Julius feels chronologically unsettled, as though anachronism has intruded into the present" (27) and that it recalls Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" "in which a form of temporal consciousness akin to this is described as a 'constellation' between the present and an image of the past that 'flashes up at a moment of danger'" (Dalley 28). It is a networked, non-linear view of history in which "time became elastic and voices cut out of the past into the present" (Cole 74), so much so that piece of canvas sheeting is initially misrecognized as "the body of a lynched man dangling from a tree" (Cole 75). Each of these indirectly connected events and perceptions performs Julius's position amongst a network of interpellative systems, but in relation to which Julius is never fixed, but only moving.

Conflation as an idea seems to intertwine with the notion of the map preceding the territory. Approaching New York in a plane, Julius is reminded of a “sprawling scale model of the city” (Cole 150) that itself evokes memory of “Borge’s cartographer” (Cole 150) who made a one-to-one scale map. In Julius’s view of New York, as with the Borgesian map, “the real city seemed to be matching, point for point, [his] memory of the model” (Cole 151). The key difference in the model there were a “pair of gray blocks on the southern tip of Manhattan, each about a foot high, representing the persistence, *in the model*, of the World Trade Center towers, which, in reality, had already been destroyed” (Cole 151, my emphasis). Thus the layering referred to earlier is not so much the construction of a linear hierarchy—that was the past and this is the present—as it is a conflation of past of present into the same experiential space, the very inextricability of which is reflected in the structure of the narrative. Even when in the air on a plane, Julius is reminded of “the numberless dead, in forgotten cities, necropoli, catacombs” (Cole 94) that haunt the edges of places like the Paris Metro. In Brussels, Julius imagines a rain falling all over Europe, “on the battlefield of Waterloo ... the Lion’s Mount, the Ardennes ... on Ypres and the huddled white crosses dotting Flanders fields, the turbulent channel, the impossibly cold sea to the north, on Denmark, France and Germany” (Cole 146). The constant invocation of a world that is both located in specific sites, but constantly evokes its connection to a broader geography and history, is persistent in the text. It is also something mirrored in technology as, on a computer monitor in the web cafe, the log of calls all over the world “looked like fiction, that such a small group of people really could be making calls to such a wide spectrum of places” (Cole 112). It seems an important

snippet, as the use of communication technology phenomenally collapses distance as Julius's consciousness does so through textuality or apprehension.

Just as interesting, however, is that the novel does not simply limit the layering of place and history to one site. Collapse and conflation are phenomena that are mirrored in Brussels, with its "peculiar European oldness" (Cole 97) sitting side-by-side with the many buildings of the EU. It is also a city that becomes a site of criss-crossed global migrations and, perhaps inevitably, "the sense of anomie was apparent even to a visitor" (Cole 100). But further, Julius's time in Brussels complicates the notion of spatial and temporal collapse by injecting into it the material-ideological hierarchies that underpin certain dimensions of globalism as an economically-rooted cultural phenomenon through Julius's time with Farouq. As such, the sense of the city as somehow being an aggregative locus for global flows of people, capital, history and ideology is interestingly highlighted by another "locus": the internet cafe. Here Julius introduces himself to Farouq by saying, "How are you doing my brother?" (Cole 101), echoing the difficult encounter Julius had with the cab driver in New York. Beyond the repetition of a potential mistake—the "aggressive familiarity" (Cole 102) that provoked Julius previously—the use of the phrase links to and implicates both Julius and Farouq in various notions of global brotherhood: of being read as Muslim in post 9/11 Brussels, or simply of being an Other.

Similarly invisible networks of global connection are invoked by Julius's calls to Lagos, Ohio and New York (Cole 102). Yet it is a sense of globalization that is countered or balanced by Farouq and Julius's conversation about Benjamin's Marxism, and orientalism in the work of a novelist: at this locus of global exchange, the terms of the

conversation are of Western academic theory. This is not a depiction of a global village of free exchange; it is a site of contestation read and written through a textual gesture toward ideological hegemony, one in which “Morocco and India are there, after all, to be oriental” (Cole 104). It is reminiscent of Spivak’s very careful argument in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” that posits a framework for articulation and reception within the systems of discourse and the globalised academy, always-already rendering any “actual” discourse of the subaltern as *differend*.⁴³

To put the matter more plainly, wherever Julius is, everywhere is with him—despite the fact that this flattening of space and time is not accompanied by a straightforwardly parallel flattening of racial, class-based or sexual hierarchies. As Halley phrases it, “the novel’s vision of urban societies comprised of the sedimented traces of past convergences emerges from the consciousness of a subject unbound by the ties that connect others to specific spatio-temporal sites of affiliation” (29). And yet, this shrinking or unmooring has pronounced effects. The phrase “victimized Other” that Cole invokes “has a far deeper resonance than it would have in any academic situation” (Cole 105) for Julius than it would just written in a book, one assumes, because both Julius and Farouq live in the same strange doubled space of being both victimized Other and subjects with the cultural capital and trajectories to think of their situations as such. The text thus positions Julius as always in multiple positions, moving between them. This move alone is not particularly revelatory, but it does point to the text’s careful articulation of the subject’s place in a series of ideological frameworks, and, just as importantly, that Julius

himself is constantly reflecting upon himself—in both senses of the phrase—and his own position.

***Toward a Finally Object-Like Subject*⁴⁴**

In *Open City*, both the narrative and Julius always operate in a multiplied view of the subject that always already posits a subject as object, flickering between various spatio-temporal instantiations of his identity. The result is a dual vision in which the interior experienced as subjectivity is placed side-by-side with a heightened awareness of both past selves as (textual) objects for consideration and the subject as currently the object of a series of Althusserian interpellations.⁴⁵ Yet, rather than the hierarchical arrangement of race in, say, the DuBoisian notion of double consciousness, Julius's movement between these fields of legibility, and the signs contained therein, seem to express a desire for a virtual supra-space in which positionality is not so much exceeded in terms of a transcendence, but is evaded in the movement between subject positions, always expressing a desire for a temporal "next" to a fixed notion of positionality.

Take, for example, Julius's first long conversation with Farouq. The entire encounter is one enabled by surface connections—by points of contact between two asymmetrical, rhizomatic webs of identity. Their conversation happens "without the usual small talk" (Cole 106) between Julius and what racists would see as "just another Arab, subject to a quick suspicious glance on the tram" (Cole 106). More importantly, "the biographical details had been irrelevant to [their] initial encounter" (Cole 106). Instead it is only the "superficial" markers and signifiers of race, global dislocation (the phonecalls)

that form a point of unity between what are, to each other—and *arguably to the reader*—textual constructions of specific identities. It is a point Julius himself makes when self-reflexively he ponders his perception by others: “my *presentation*—the dark, unsmiling, solitary stranger” (Cole 106, my emphasis). It is a rare moment in the text when a simmering undercurrent—that of the constant interplay of interior and exterior, or the impossibility of representing subjectivity through signs and the inevitability of the attempt at such—is laid bare. The impossibility of extricating individual moments of conversation from their contexts is clearly at the forefront of the conversation about anti-Semitism and Zionism. When Julius argues that Americans “were particularly wary of strong criticism of Israel because it could become anti-Semitic” (Cole 124), it is because such thoughts had “through long practice become prerational” (Cole 124). There is only the entry into the pre-existing rhizome of thought, and though it seems oblique, it is important that, eventually, Julius can only see Farouq as “the young Vito Corleone” (Cole 129). The impossibility of both “seeing inside” and “seeing unadorned” is echoed later when Julius’s view of an evening spent at a club invokes the same “mental constriction” (Cole 139) when he learns that most people there are from Rwanda, and cannot help but think “who, among those present ... had killed, or witnessed killing?” (Cole 139). As with the cleaning lady at the Church, all Julius can do is speculate, because “she possessed her secrets fully” (Cole 140). The text repeatedly invokes the inscrutability of the subject-as-text, the lack of not simply any clear hermeneutic frame to apprehend the subject, but also of any system of understanding that can somehow gauge and position the interiority of subjectivity in relation to the exterior markers of history and geography.

Rather than the holographic self of an aspirational horizon, here we have the holographic self as a matrix of self-expressions in which each node is a flickering signifier. Or, to use Massumi's terminology, it is the body without an image: "an accumulation of relative perspectives and the passages between them, an additive space of utter receptivity retaining and combining past movements, in intensity, extracted from their actual terms" (57). Any clear understanding of Julius must operate from a perspective of flicker and flux, of a pattern of movement in relation to moving, overlapping fields of interpretation. It is not that the *idea* itself is new or revolutionary; rather, that Julius is constructed in this manner evokes a desire for a beyond to positionality that does not seek transcendence, but rather resists the static—or what Massumi calls "freeze-frame"—view of the subjectivity as thing, rather than process. The body without an image is the subject without a correlative signifier. It is instead the movement between images, and both Massumi's language and Cole's novel attempt to map out the temporal flow of subjectivity. In fact, one could argue that it is what is mimetically mapped out is the phenomenal "movement" between subjective instantiations that grounds the text as of a holographic epistemology.

In a related fashion, Julius's sexual encounter in Brussels vacillates between first-person description and a strangely detached gaze. It is as if a third voice is suggesting that "the afternoon was a surprise ... for the tourist" (Cole 109), and it is a moment cemented by the fact that after the sexual partner tells him her name, he "forgot it immediately" (Cole 110). The narrator describes the liaison as "something needful I'd neglected to do. Now it was done" (Cole 111), as if he is considering his own actions as those of a character

in a play. An anachronistically “moralistic” reading would of course be easy. More interesting and attuned to the text, however, one wonders if readers are vicariously experiencing the thoughts of Julius—or if, perhaps more accurately, readers experience the narrator’s vicariously experience himself, as if “he” is watching himself as an object. In fact, upon waking up from a dream shortly later, Julius is dislocated, asking: “What country is this? What is this house and who am I with?” (Cole 131). He must remind himself he is “a someone, not a body without a being” (Cole 131), and in doing so—in grounding himself in the “trivial-seeming ballast” (Cole 131) of the ritual of rubbish trucks—Julius suggests: “I had slowly returned to myself from a distance” (Cole 131). The effect is always a multiplied sense of Julius for the reader—namely, the narrator who represents an ambivalent blend of omniscience and first-person introspection, and “Julius” the textual construction performed by the narrative and narrator. If such an effect can still be held under the category of an “unreliable narrator,” then what differentiates it is that the narrator is not quite “unreliable” as such; “he” simply builds a picture of Julius in a non-linear fashion. The moment here of being unable to locate the self in a strange geographic context—but one that is also grounded in the cyclical ritual of temporality—comes at the centre of the book. In the 2012 Random House edition, it occurs on page 130-131, in a novel that ends on page 259. It is quickly followed by a passage of teenage yearning in which Julius “pushed by a longing that felt almost external” (Cole 135). Julius, it seems, is never quite inside himself.

An Object-ive Style for the Subject

Such a constantly multiplied view of Julius, I argue, is a phenomenon that stems from not only the text's thematic concerns, but its stylistic ones too. As such, how the text's prose style and structure intersect with and expresses the novel's concerns with the subject, identity and location must be examined. Julius is "a flickering subject." Hayles argues that when "writing yields to flickering signifiers underwritten by binary digits, the narrator becomes not so much a scribe as a cyborg authorized to access the relevant codes" (43). The argument is intriguing, if as one that almost works better as metaphor: that the narrator, situated in a text, itself situated in an epistemological context of digital informatics, operates as a present/absent mediator, a "body" scattered across the differing worlds of text and reader, each of which are obviously multiple. Interestingly then, the image-structure allows one to think of the narrator "less as a speaking voice endowed with a plausible psychology than a series of fissures and dislocations that push toward a new kind of subjectivity" (Hayles 45). It is, to return to the introduction, the model of the subject at work in *Oblivion*: dispersed and scattered across a topology of surfaces. It is a textual identity that "exists and is recognized because of knowing the codes" (Hayles 45), one in which, "given market forces already at work ... we will increasingly live, work and play in environments that construct as embodied virtualities" (Hayles 48). That fascinating latter phrase, I argue, must conceive of a body as the locus or manifestation of a set of "pre-existing" discursive representations of identity scattered electronically across a spatio-temporally multiple horizon of self-recognition, and that any sense of *an* identity has to be found in the movement or flux or between those scattered nodes. The virtual

representation comes first, a body “later,” an inversion of chronology akin to the ideas of speech and writing in Derrida’s notion of *écriture* or arche-writing. In a literal sense, speech or the body comes first; in a figurative, epistemological, or systemic sense, the primacy lies in the arrangement of difference within an ongoing system of exchange. But I would also suggest that while Hayles is speaking of codes here in terms of a contrast of linguistic and programmatic ones, it is also useful to think of this doubledness in terms of an overlapped sense of both “cultural codes” and cultural identity. That is to say that if flickering subject is a useful term to think through the interrelated phenomenological relation between a bodily self and a holographic one, then it is equally useful to think through cultural hybridity, not least because of the necessity of a virtual supra-cultural position from which to read any gesture toward “a whole self.” As such, it is precisely the question of self-knowledge and self-reflexivity that becomes crucial to understand Julius in the text, as it is that which positions the novel’s representation of subjectivity as both “flickering” and “in movement.”

Fundamentally, Julius is strange to himself. The style of the reflections and ruminations he engages in “suggests someone quoting from written sources rather than daydreaming on a stroll across town” (Halley 28), and Halley argues that at times “*Open City* seems less like a representation of its protagonist’s consciousness than a vehicle for extraneous historical knowledge” (29). Although one may argue—as some reviewers do—that Julius thus becomes a convenient textual construct to explore ideas, there is more at work here. Firstly, in the highly meta-textual nature of the text, which I will refer to more specifically in relation to reading later, there is perhaps the suggestion of grappling with

something new, whether cosmopolitanism or the techno-ideological ground for such. Secondly, and by extension, as Halley argues, Julius's "alienating qualities are not, therefore, accidental, but are fundamental to *Open City*'s examination of how individuals locate themselves in history and territory—in other words, to the novel's analysis of spatio-temporal imaginaries" (29).

For instance: Beyond the cool, detached prose Cole employs in a first-person narrative, "half-German, half-Nigerian" Julius has a rarely-used Yoruba middle name that is "like something that belonged to someone else but had long been held in [his] keeping" (Cole 78). He is thus marked out to himself and others as "not fully Nigerian" (Cole 78). In and of itself, it is an almost clichéd postcolonial invocation of hybridity and the impossibility of registering as "fully anything" when a hyphenated identity reifies the very categories one seeks to make fluid. More importantly for my purposes, though, is that Julius must engage in the same discursive self-consideration that always implied a spatial rhetoric of the self, held at a distance. When the narrator says that "the name Julius linked [him] to another place" (Cole 78), one is reminded of not only Descartes considering his disembodied consciousness floating ahead of him, but also Jas/on's virtual-textual identity, Arjun's digital virtual extensions of himself, and the various wraiths of *Pattern Recognition*. The narrator asserts that "we experience life as a continuity, and only after it falls away, after it becomes the past, do we see its discontinuities" (Cole 155). It is life *in movement* that grounds life-as-narrative in *Open City*, and like patterns and randomness in *Pattern Recognition*, sense is made through the retroactive rearrangement of the narrativized construction of self. More to the point,

memory is described as a blank “mostly empty space” (Cole 155) punctuated with a few things “remembered with an outsize intensity” (Cole 155). The view of the self is flattened, almost object-oriented⁴⁶ as a series of memories-as-objects, always withdrawing into their hidden relations. And it is the movement between these expressions that is formalized in the novel’s narrative, but in that formalization—or form-ulation—the text also expresses its model of the subject as that sense of movement.

Thought of this way, the foreshadowing of this moment seems especially poignant, as here Julius reconnects with Moji Kasali. For Julius, it is a “sudden reencounter ... [with] some part of myself [he] had relegated” (Cole 156) to the past, an “apparition” which “appears” or is produced in the moments as part of network of signifiers that link Julius to the various hidden memory-objects that constitute his past and sense of self. When Dr. Saito dies, Julius doubts their friendship after he realizes their relationship had occurred “outside a network of other connected relationships” (Cole 184), as if the singular, closed connection, unread by others, cannot possibly be true. Continuing the pattern of analogous contrast, Julius soon finds himself in an area of a city in which there is no one “who was not originally from East Asia” (Cole 188). It is an urban space that not only collapses history, but also appears to be atemporal, and Julius feels “as if [he] had stumbled into a kink in time and place” (Cole 191). The novel then does what it does so often: concentrates this collapse of frameworks, such that a band that a street band that plays not only contains notes that are “spiritual cousins of the offstage clarion in Mahler’s Second Symphony” (Cole 191), but that also reminds Julius of the songs he sung as a boy in Nigeria, such that the present is represented as a “sound came into the shop like shafts

of interrupted light” (Cole 192), diaphanous and ambivalently material—or as I describe it, holographic.

What becomes fascinating is that this moment of atemporal collapse results in Julius having the experience of “the sudden disorientation of land bliss of one who ... at a great distance from a mirrored wall, could clearly see the world doubled in on itself” (Cole 192). Julius is not simply aware of the shrinking of interpretive frames, but is instead acutely aware of the notion of the double, of the always-dual frame through which self-recognition and subject-object relations occur:

[T]his double of mine had, at that precise moment, begun to tussle with the same problem as its equally confused original. To be alive, it seemed to me, as I stood there in all kinds of sorrow, was to be both original and reflection, and to be dead was to be split off, to be reflection alone. (Cole 192).

There are two things to be said about this moment: one is the textual expression of the necessary moment of both self-recognition, but also subjectivity itself; the other is that in the awareness of doubled view of a past-self and present-self constantly overlapping and intermingling, Julius can “no longer tell where the tangible universe ended and the reflected one began” (Cole 192).

Taken alone, such thoughts in the novel would simply be interesting reflections on identity. But they occur just before two pivotal events in the text, each a moment of violence, and each intimately bound up in questions of identity and self-conception. Firstly is the assault that Julius suffers at the hands of two youths. Julius is doubled here in two ways. The assumed racial solidarity stems from the text’s implied (self)sameness

between Julius and his attackers. Julius again seems to witness himself outside of himself. Especially poignant is the prose style of the assault. The narrator has “no mortal fear” and instead simply remarks that “I was being beaten, but it was not severe, certainly not as severe as it could be if they were truly angry” (Cole 213). The tone and use of the passive voice is as if he is describing a curiosity, rather than his own pain and worry, as if he had in fact “lost the will to speak” (Cole 212), just as when the assault is over, Julius says it “wasn’t my mouth ... this unco-operative, alien, ugly mouth” (Cole 214). This inarticulateness is doubled in the attackers. Their words “seemed somehow distant from the situation, as if they were addressing someone else, as if this were like all other times I had encountered those words” (Cole 213). Later, the incident becomes simply another moment out time, whose “shape was restored” (Cole 213) when the event is over. The distinction between subjects blurs, and then re-emerges.

Secondly is the key revelation of the text’s concerns with spatio-temporal collapse, identity and self-recognition crystallize in the genuinely shocking revelation that Julius raped Moji some years ago. It is impossible to separate the revelation of Moji’s sexual assault at the hands of Julius from an emphasis upon the dominant themes of the book: the intertwined collapse of spatio-temporal phenomenality expressed through the flattening of signs, as the protagonist attempts to negotiate a movement between sites of trauma. The language and images used focus the text’s concern with the local always manifesting a virtual global, such that a set of stairs are “vertiginous and reminiscent of the much longer stairs leading up to the *Sacre-Coeur* in Montmartre” (Cole 236). Furthermore, they “brought me out into the dead end of Pinehurst, a different world from

the busy street life a few dozen yards below: residential buildings, a richer, whiter neighbourhood” (Cole 236). Julius is moving not only through space, but also globally-inflected social strata. If the novel consistently invokes the hermeneutic frames of recognition—specifically, history—what does it then do with the things recognized? It seems that the latter part of the text becomes explicitly and self-consciously concerned with signs and recognition, starting with their origin in the Medieval theory of Signs, in which “the certainty that God ... had scattered clues to the useful functions of created things in those things” (Cole 237). The interjection is odd, but it suddenly clarifies a great deal about the text.

The narrator suggests that “we are familiar with this theory of Signs in the debased forms of phrenology, eugenics and racism” (Cole 238), dismissing the clear connection between a sign and a referent. However, the narrator then goes on to suggest that a concern with signs is a “sensitivity to this interplay between *inner spirit and outer substance*” (Cole 238, my emphasis), between a legible signifying object and the “inherent” inner content of that object. Quickly, the text suggests that subjects are signifying objects of a sort, as this “attempt to marry the spirit the material with its visible form ... is particularly true in the case of those us who are psychiatrists, who attempt to use external Signs as clues to internal realities, even when the relationship between the two is not at all clear” (Cole 238). This section of the text also emphasises seeing in its description of the “million or so ganglia of the optic nerve” and it suggests that “the work psychiatrists in particular ... was a blind spot so broad that it had taken over most of the eye” (Cole 239). As such, right before the moment the text peels back that the

introspective, quiet Julius once raped a woman, it explicitly invokes the issue of recognition, such that a secure link between exterior signs and a fixed interior identity becomes impossible. Additionally, the invocation of psychiatry inevitably evokes an analogous relationship between medical attempts to read a subject and literary attempts at the same.

The obvious and still useful interpretation here is that of a confrontation with the real, and a desire to suppress it through repression or sublimation. At the same time, however, it may be useful to consider Massumi's notion of proprioception, again from "The Bleed," in order to think through how the text articulates a movement between moments of articulation. Proprioception is literally "the sensibility proper to muscles and ligaments as opposed to tactile sensibility" (Massumi 58). Yet, Massumi invokes the term to connote a kind of mediating layer in which "proprioception folds tactility into the body, enveloping the skin's contact with the external world in a dimension of medium depth: between epidermis and viscera" (58). Perhaps more importantly, Massumi goes on to suggest that the "in between nature" of proprioception as a figurative concept means that "this asubjective and nonobjective medium depth is one of the strata proper to the corporeal" (59)—which is to say, is of an order of something other than signification—and as a result is a useful way of thinking through how movement-vision registers on multiple fields, one of which is the affective. I raise the point, however, because if the "body without an image" forms a useful model for thinking of the subject-in-movement, then affect—which to Massumi, is a visceral, corporeal intensity—that "medium-depth" perception is "most directly implicated in the body's registration of the in-betweenness of

the incorporeal event” (62). This is to say that, in the case of *Open City*, Julius as subject-in-flux is not only a subject involved in repression, but akin to Massumi’s explication of Reagan’s trajectory, is involved in the search for “the exemplary event” that will allow him to come to terms with himself—or to find “completion” which “denotes an ideal being and, as such, lies beyond the reach of becoming (Massumi 64). Again, here is the aspirational horizon or pole—or, in this case, what Massumi calls “blank mimicry” to evoke a self-same relation to an image-in-flux—but in this instance, the aspiration is an abstract wholeness, an ideal of “being-complete *unity*” (Massumi 64, original emphasis). The unity, however, is one of concordance-in-movement, with a self-relation that “matches” the various, dispersed instantiations of self, scattered across space-time, narrativized to become “the self.” It is a self-relation of both signs and affect, bodily markers and bodily sensation, such that the dual impulse to construct the self in a particular manner is always, at once, an inscription and an intensity, an ordering of signs and an ordering of affect in relation to an ideal that is not the binary dialectic of *Londonstani* or *Transmission*, but an altogether more swarm-like arrangement of scattered part-selves operating in relation to the *substance* of an exemplary (ego) ideal.

Open City, therefore, performs a relation of an internal-external revelation: a doubled revealing of self to the self, and textual-self to the reader, as it also registers in numerous registers—socio-historical, narratological, and affective. When the narrator suggests that “each person ... must assume that the room of his own mind, cannot be, entirely opaque to him” (Cole 243), it is counterbalanced by the notion of villains and heroes—that “whatever our self-admitted eccentricities might be, we are not the villains

of our own stories” (Cole 243). There is a tension between the consideration of self at a distance, held aloft and observed “objectively” like in the Cartesian imagination, and the narrativisation of self which is a constant process of revision and rationalization. Again, it is also a pattern which contains two layers, the process of Julius’s own self-discovery, and the reader’s same work. In fact, it seems the text invokes this idea quite explicitly:

Who, in the age of television, hasn’t stood in front of a mirror and imagined his life as a show that is already perhaps watched by multitudes? Who has not, with this consideration in mind, brought something performative into his everyday life. We have the ability to do both good and evil, and more than not, we choose the good. When we don’t neither we nor our imagined audience is troubled, because we are able to articulate ourselves to ourselves, and because we have, through our other decisions, merited their sympathy. (Cole 243)

The passage crystallizes the whole meta-textual thrust of the novel. Even though a book reviewer might assess that the relation is a bit too on-the-nose, I would suggest that the implication of the reader—that we who have perhaps identified with Julius through the very process that connects the linear structure of reading and reading-as-revelation—does something quite unique. It performs for the reader not simply the plain, obvious truth that any full apprehension of the subject is impossible; rather, it asserts that in taking in a subject as a carefully performed set of signs, we articulate our vision of “who the subject is” through a process of identification and ideological-discursive positioning such that the relation is both of self-construction and affective relation. Put another way—and in a manner deliberately exaggerated and emphasized—as *Open City* performs

the impossibility of singular ethical evaluations of subjects, it also performs the commonplace apprehension of subjects through self-constructed systems of signs, whether clothing, the body, language—or, for the purposes of this dissertation, the online profile. The operation of one set of identity markers—the body, clothing, and other physical forms—functions in relation to a series of self-representative objects, be they writings, introspections, digital avatars and so on. This moment in the text collapses those distances between self and self-image, bodily subject and subject-in-relation-to-memory, in order to perform the overlapped notion of the multiplicity of a subject and the multiplicity of fields of self-representation. The hologram here is not the aspirational ego-ideal; it is the arrangement of numerous instantiations bound by the substance of the ego-ideal as the narrativizing force.

The powerful moment of revelation in which Moji, in a resigned, “strained, shattered tone” (Cole 245) accuses Julius suggests not only that he committed a crime in the past, but that he has not changed at all. If one were to approach the text with a Bakhtinian sense of dialogism, here is perhaps the first expression of Julius from another perspective, one which damns him—and quite convincingly too—for being a terrible person. After all, when Moji demands that Julius say something in response, expecting nothing, that is exactly what she gets, and instead the narrator finds “relief” in the fact Moji did not “begin to cry” (Cole 246). The parable of Nietzsche burning himself—that instead of grasping a hot coal, he merely expressed a contempt for pain through “several lit matchsticks that he placed in the center of his palm” (Cole 246), which “an alarmed school yard prefect had knocked to the ground” (Cole 246)—marks out Julius’s own

attempts at grappling with a discomfiting truth and running away. Julius is both “Nietzsche” and the alarmed prefect at once. If the doubled identity of present self and past self consistently runs through the book, here one part of self “saves” the other from contemplating itself differently. Significantly, then, as the text resumes its blank, flat prose after the revelation, the reader is presented with a long litany of objects, or signs, as a kind of obfuscatory tactic. Instead of any reflection at all about Moji or Julius’s own culpability, there is instead “a few books,” “my computer,” “a corkboard,” a man in “an ankle-length white robe,” a street “patterned with the converging, silvery lines of street tram” (Cole 248), the latter especially conjuring the image of an optical illusion meant to trick the eyes. It is an endless, overwhelming stream of signs from a character who is just revealed as a rapist.

The tension over the relationship between inner and outer, sign and referent, the legible and the knowable, is thus laid out and enacted by the text. The holographic self, as a relational structure, operates to obscure a self through movement, through the linearity of text. The revelation occurs, and then the text keeps going. Movement-vision, the attempt to think through the subject as an ongoing shifting between ever-receding images, is, as it is in the case of Reagan, cast as a method of self-obfuscation, of repression in the service of producing an acceptable vision of the self. Halley argues that this moment is about a kind of corrective or counterbalancing to the movement of self implied by the text’s lack of fixity:

A form of spatio-temporal fixity thus reappears at the end of *Open City* as the hidden precondition of Julius’s cosmopolitan ethos. His fantasy of a mode of

existence in which spatio-temporal locations can be constellated to create an ungrounded, non-teleological historical awareness functions to repress the memory of a specific action that happened in a particular time and place and that, for its victim. (31)

Given the age of Julius at the time of the act, it is fair to ask if the text seeks to condemn him outright; in fact, it seems worth inquiring into whether the text is meant, as one reviewer suggests, to work as a kind of “psychological hand-grenade,”⁴⁷ upsetting easy ethical evaluation of the subject, or if it works hard to refute any dichotomous characterizations at all. There is in fact a gesture to such in the statement that “Mahler’s music is not white, or black, not old or young, and whether it is even specifically human, rather than in accord with more universal vibrations, is open to question” (Cole 252). But here at the end of the novel, Mahler is invoked as a figure who “made himself a master of the ends of symphonies, the end of a body of work, and the end of his own life” (Cole 250), as if we too are now being asked to make sense of art “at the end.” Mahler is also bound up in images of light, with Julius considering the musician’s life in terms of the ambivalent, layered idea of “how clouds race across sunlit canyons formed by skyscrapers, so that the stark divisions of dark and light are shot through with the passing light and dark” (Cole 250).

The contrast at this point in the text is delicate and complicated. Just after Julius is revealed to have severe flaws as an empathetic subject, he is also the person who points out that “almost everyone, as almost always at such concerts, was white” (Cole 251), something that Julius states is part of “a quick complex series of negotiations: chiding

myself for even seeing, it, lamenting the reminders of how divided our life still remains, being annoyed that these thoughts can be counted on to pass through my mind at some point in the evening” (Cole 251). It is another meta-moment in which the issue of recognizing race as a factor in a social milieu is reflected in whether or not race plays a factor in the reader’s contemplation of “who Julius is.” It is a frame made perhaps even more complicated by the narrator’s long, subtle appreciation of Mahler’s music itself—as if, quite suddenly and through a specific formal choice, the reader is left to ask whether or not Julius is so bad after all. One is reminded of the idea that, if all art after Auschwitz is barbaric,⁴⁸ it is in no small part due to the tendency of senior Nazi officials to appreciate Wagner and Goethe. Here at the end, the movement-vision of the novel is seen to repress a material intersubjective connection—by which I mean the fact of rape. What it suggests is that the model of the holographic subject in which the self is in flux between a constellation of differing spatio-temporal expressions is not one without consequence. It always carries the risk of an effacement or a repression, in which the scattered, dispersed self constantly *moves* from ethical or legal consequence through the very notion of unfixity itself.

The final few pages of the novel thus elegantly concentrate its concerns, with Cole’s deft indirectness and self-reflexivity. Julius listens “as always, with both my mind and my body” (Cole 252), the dichotomous pairing in which he is found “entering” (Cole 252) the music evocative of Descartes’s own inevitably spatial rhetoric of self-consideration. The physical space in which Julius sits is layered with history as he is reminded that “almost a hundred years ago ... Mahler had been at work on this very

symphony" (Cole 253), the supposedly linear trajectory of history once again collapsing into a "singular" experiential frame. At the moment of this experience, Julius is surrounded "in the company of hundreds of others" (Cole 255), as if "in God's arms" (Cole 255)—until he exits Carnegie Hall mistakenly via an emergency exit, a door designed to provide an escape in a moment of urgent need and which is designed not let one back in. It is almost as if in consideration of Mahler's long, fruitful life and his death, Julius reflects back on his own and must suddenly escape. Stuck on a fire escape, Julius is then "faced a solitude of a rare purity" (Cole 255). There, the emphasis is on what is seen and not, what exists between the pinpricks of light and "dark spaces between the dead" (Cole 256) which, to look into, "was to have a direct glimpse of the future" (Cole 256). There, his "entire being was caught up in a blind spot" (Cole 256), and Julius's own sense of ethical evaluation of self is "hidden" from him—and perhaps by him.

What to make, then, of the text's final two pages? At the end of *Pattern Recognition*, Cayce finally sleeps, arriving at a centred wholeness in which the mysteries are solved, and she is next to someone she cares for. Julius, by contrast, is on a boat, in motion, that he was never meant to be on, almost like a stowaway, reflecting on the ambivalent nature of the Statue of Liberty that "was a working lighthouse" (Cole 258), the flame from which "guided ships into Manhattan harbour" and also "especially in bad weather, fatally disoriented birds" (Cole 258). The obviously implied articulation of America's ambivalence is heightened by "the sense that something more troubling was at work" (Cole 259), and that the novel's final line is a an inexplicable anomaly—that the

death of 175 wrens occurred on October 13, “although the night just past hadn’t been particularly windy or dark” (Cole 259)—seems meant to resist understanding at all.

The Holographic Subject as Flickering Movement

What the ending of the *Open City* asserts is the impossibility of arriving at a clear linear explanation for a specific outcome. In 2015, such an assertion seems plain, and almost obvious; what could be more cliché for a post- or post-postmodern novel than the ambivalence of meaning? But the ending of this decidedly non-linear novel must be considered in light of the text’s clearly articulated concerns: the recognition and categorization of the subject; the clear articulation of a historical trajectory or context, even as it resists a clearness of trajectory; identity in its spatio-temporal multiplicity—a multiplicity that is multiplied by the expansion of phenomenal sites through and on which to apprehend the subject as mediated through media as a series of signs; a concern with signification in general in relation to not only competing semiotic codes, but contradictory ones, too; and finally, a meta-textual concern with the slipping of the image-of-self as it relates to temporality, performed as it is through the forward-movement of text itself, in the text’s skipping along from trauma to introspection, to trauma and introspection again.

This project has, through its entirety, tried to approach the expression of the impact of digitality in two ways: in clear, explicit literary invocations of “digital virtuality,” such as in *Transmission* and *Pattern Recognition*; and in indirect, vague, and imprecise literary articulations of “epistemological” changes that neither reduce specific examples to

“this is an effect of the internet,” but at the same time do not refuse the idea that digitality has something to do with the underpinnings of those specific literary choices, particularly in the articulation of a kind of “post-internet” notion of subjectivity. Cole’s *Open City* falls into the latter. In my analysis, in which I have emphasized spatio-temporal collapse, the collapse between subject and object, and the relational movement and flux between such categories, digital technology hovers only at the edges of text, where, as I have suggested, it evokes Julius’s position amongst various global networks of exchange that are often brought to bear on a subject. But given the text’s very clear evocation of sign theory and signification near the pivotal “reveal” at the text’s close, the reader is left to wonder: why does a novel so concerned with the contemporary conflation of geographic, cultural and historical distance and difference also so intensely problematize the reading of the subject—and perhaps, even more specifically, the subject as “freeze frame” position on a grid?

There are obviously many answers to that question, and it would be futile and even perhaps “anti-literary” to attempt to pin down a response through asserting some sort of clear causal relationship between a set of socio-historical conditions and their “literary expression.” Instead, I suggest that *Open City* can be read as expressive of the ethical implications of the radically expanded capacity to read subjects as spatio-temporally multiple collections of signs such that one can only ever witness part of the movement between those signs. The presence of an online means there is no offline; rather there is only the world Enframed by the always-present potentiality of a field of media sustained and existent “in” and “through” digital technology. It is not, of course,

that a subject-as-text is a new phenomenon. Indeed, though I argued as such through René Descartes and Walter Ong, the notion of a body-as-text and subjectivity as always receding in intersubjective relations precisely because it is only ever accessible to other subjects *as texts* is simply a given. Instead, I argue that at the end of *Open City*, rather than a dialogic novel, one is presented with a dialogic representation of the subject, a constellation of multiple spatio-temporal expressions of self unified under the single taxonomic signifier “Julius,” and only the movement of the subject between them. In the introduction to *How We Became Posthuman*, Hayles argues that “here at the inaugural moment of the computer age, the erasure of embodiment is performed so that ‘intelligence’ becomes a property of the formal manipulation of symbols rather than the enaction in the human life-world” (Hayles xi). Julius is the “effect” of that phenomenon, or as Massumi puts it in a different context, the effect of the technologizing of the event. In refusing an explicit ethical evaluation of Julius, choosing instead to suspend the various visions of Julius in dialogic relation *as movement*, *Open City* forms an allegorical expression for the temporal relation between the multiple representations of self that form the phenomenological ground for both Jas/on’s path in *Londonstani* and Arjun’s in *Transmission*. There is a significant caveat, however. Unlike Jas and Arjun, the implied and potential sympathetic identification formed between reader and Julius is one interrupted by the revelation of rape. The subject is not simply a constellation of expressions presented on a horizon of subjectivity—a holographic self that is, rather than a relation of fantasy, a relation of selves flattened out into constellational arrangement. Quite to the contrary, both Julius’s presentation to the reader *and* his own self-relation to

the self-as-object is a process of obfuscation and movement—or, perhaps, obfuscation-as-movement, such that the text’s self-reflexive emphasis upon temporality is also an expression of the spatial temporal relation between “versions” of selves. When the self is spatio-temporally dispersed, the unification of that self under a single taxonomic identifier can only be understood as relation between those dispersed versions—a phenomenon that complicates the entrance of that singular notion of self into ethical, legal, or social systems. Julius is constructed through the linearity of signification as a particular kind of subject—introspective, moral, progressively political—such that the revealing of a profoundly violent act constructs the very act of (self)presentation as a method of evading ethical evaluation by himself—but one that is also predicated upon the temporal experience of reading the revelation to have it then be obscured by the simple forward movement of the novel.

As such, unlike the potentially hopeful—if also problematic—liberatory trajectories of Arjun and Jas/on, Julius can be read as the problematic figure of the “digital virtual self”: an arrangement of instantiations that, in its very post-postmodern refusal of singularity, taxonomy and easy legibility, troubles the very conception of reading a subject when that subject engages in activity that is often obscured by a spatio-temporal multiplication of sites for activity. Julius is thus a digital-era self *par excellence*: rather than a single subjectivity or identity, he is presented as a matrix of specific expressions of self, scattered across space and time, judging himself from an always-virtual “centre” that cannot be located, but is nonetheless inscribed as substance. He is thus as much object as subject: forever withdrawing from view, not simply to other

subjects, but also from himself, and from a system that constructs ethical evaluation as an idea attached to a singular subject as a singular spatio-temporal instantiation, expressed by a single taxonomic signifier—now forever exploded.

CONCLUSION: THE HOLOGRAPHIC CYBORG

In a project so thoroughly focused upon endings—on the ways in which the narratives examined here have moved through a linear path toward a particular conclusion—it was perhaps inevitable that the end of the analysis would come to be crucial. As in *Londonstani* or *Open City*, where the revelations near the ends of the texts dramatically alter the tone, texture, and implications of the novels—almost moving backwards through the books, reconfiguring their sense and logic—here too at the end of this dissertation, a certain retroactivity is required. If the novels I have examined all invoked or played with a kind of “implied telos,” whether self-actualization, escape, or simple resolution, I too have been moving toward, and at times perhaps also circumlocuting, a tacit, yet central topic: that of a potential cyborg post-digital subjectivity, a concept I have invoked through the metaphor of the holographic self.

Like the revelations concerning Jas/on, Julius, or *Transmission*’s Arjun and his movement into a space “beyond,” the invocation of something approaching a cyborg post-digital subjectivity demands a kind of retroactive re-examination of the texts. In part, this need stems from the usual pragmatic concerns. Like so many dissertations before it, this one was completed over the course of a few years, during which not only did my own thinking change, but so too did the field, in addition to the technologies in question and their place in a given set of social relations. They thus reframed and challenged my approach to these texts and ideas. Yet, at the same time, this potential inversion of good academic form—that reframing and redrawing the project comes at the

end—is also metaphorically linked to the linearity of process in locating a single object within a network: that if the digital virtual can sometimes manifest visually or structurally a set of non-linear, non-hierarchical relations, seeing patterns or points in situ *always* requires a certain retroactive gaze, a looking back to make sense of after having arrived at a place through circuitous means. This conclusion will thus be somewhat unorthodox, presenting new texts and arguments in the service of re-presenting my own readings of the novels and ideas in question in relation to a new set of ideas, so as to refract and (re)inflect them slightly.

Yet the “revelation” here at the end of this project obviously is not a revelation as such, and not only because I do not wish to assert such a grandiose claim. Instead, because any invocation of a post-digital subjectivity is far too vast a topic to do such eager things with as “describe” or “define” in any comprehensive sense, the “twist” at the end concerns what the cyborg holographic self means for questions concerning the phenomenal ground of positionality and subjectivity. Why is it that all three of the central contemporary novels—*Londonstani*, *Transmission*, and *Open City*, each novels of cosmopolitan immigrant identity—are not only so concerned with how self-presentation occurs in relation to the spatio-temporal dimensions of representation, but also are so *explicit* about that concern and what it means for the protagonists’ identities—each of the texts slipping into highly meta-textual gestures that might, in other circumstances, be considered a bit too on the nose? At the core of all these texts has been the issue of identity—of where it is located, how it is read, how it is linked to taxonomy and signification—and how in all the texts, there is not only a persistent desire to *exceed*

identity or positionality, but to do so by invoking a relation to an emerging field of self-presentation.

I would argue this is why the hologram as a form of self-representation is such a useful metaphor. A hologram is partial and, rather than being self-sufficient, operates in relation to something it also stands for. The hologram is not a metaphor for subjectivity itself, but rather a metaphor for its own function as-representation within a constellational arrangement of sites of subjectivity. The *hologram* is a specific *type* of self-representation, rather than a *model* of such. Thus, the desire to exceed both a singular notion of (in this case, a mostly raced) identity and the body are at the root of what we might call holographic subjectivity, but by extension, also the issue of whether or not such exceeding demands one consider something called “holographic writing” as well, a term borrowed and modified by Yaszek’s notion of “cyborg writing” in *The Self Wired*, which I will refer to in more depth shortly.

Yet, in addition to an emphasis on ends, the holographic self as a concept is predicated on a relation or connection. It is precisely the foregrounding of the simultaneity of the parallax relation between a body and scattered, dispersed representations of self that mark out the holographic self as being of digitality. The public self—that in digitality exists in the construction of text and image that stands for the self—also exists in oral contexts as well as chirographics and typographics, too. Yet take, for example, the individual sitting in a coffee shop, smartphone in hand. She can, within the same frame of time, engage in face-to-face interaction, as she also produces

numerous other versions of self through particular techno-social structures. It is not necessarily the relationality of this phenomenon that is unique to digitality, as my examination of both Ong and Descartes, not to mention Wilde and Brontë, suggests. It is instead the both “degree” and scope of that simultaneity as an experiential possibility—the pace of the back and forth between bodily and digital selves—but also the epistemological imbrication of the non-bodily and bodily self, and the resultant affective effect on the subject. The persistence and internal functioning of what I have called the “supra-subjective” nature of the digital virtual is what produces the holographic self as holographic—as always the body *as seen* through not only the hologram of digital self-representation, but its logic as well.

As such, this conclusion is itself a kind of hologram: a translucent thing to be suspended in front of what lies behind it to function as part of a sense-making interface. It is, in a way, a reconsideration of the pre-existing argument, but not one made to supersede it, but instead, to exist in relation to it. Therefore, one can only do two things: first to think through the mutual co-constitution of the analytic frames used “in” the texts and these literary texts’ expressions of the subject and subjectivity, in order to arrive at a sense of what *these novels specifically* and taken as a whole express about post-digital subjectivity and its relation to virtuality; and, second, to gesture toward a few key, promising theoretical notions that, in subsequent studies, might lead to a fuller, more fleshed-out sense of the ways that subjectivity is changing in relation to digitality. If, as I stated in the introduction, this dissertation is a record of both scholarship and a thought process over time, then this conclusion will also be a journey in which I return to the

texts with a slightly modified analytic frame that pays closer (or at least different) attention to the digital and subjectivity's place in my understanding of the fiction, paying close attention to the manner in which the holographic self expresses a desire to exceed positionality. To that end, I will first return to Donna Haraway's much-cited "Cyborg Manifesto" to re-ground the notion of the holographic self as both manifestation and extension of the cyborg metaphor. To explain this shift in terms of narrative mode, I will examine the idea of cyborg writing in Yaszek's dissertation, *The Self Wired*. Then, relying on J Sage Elwell's "The Transmediated Self," I will examine what the specific changes between the cyborg and holographic self are, paying attention to how the differing metaphors reframe notions of the subject, in order to articulate more fully the *logic* of the holographic self. However, I will end by arguing that the flattening of the constellational arrangement of subjective nodes which constitute a virtual idea of identity may in fact provide the beginnings of a material, phenomenal ground for a post-positionality identity—at least as it relates to affect or intensity. Essentially, however, my aim here in the conclusion is to frame the three focal text's of this project as various expressions of my concept of the holographic self, itself a modified concept of the cyborg which builds upon the work of Haraway to construct another "ironic myth" that seeks to exceed the problem of position.

Almost inevitably, then, the figure that has been mostly skirted around thus far, but is nonetheless crucial to think through is the cyborg: the intertwined machinic and bodily metaphor that is associated with the work of Donna Haraway and her vital "manifesto."⁴⁹ As metaphor, Haraway's invocation of the cyborg—"a cybernetic organism,

a hybrid of machine and organism” (Haraway 149)— is a kind of theoretical speculative fiction: a working through of a fictional idea in order to retroactively rethink “the reality” that precedes it. Yet at the same time, Haraway’s cyborg is also “a creature of social reality ... [and] lived social relations” (Haraway 149). As such, the indeterminate nature of this “ironic political myth” (Haraway 149), that is at once both fictional projection into the future and a materially-grounded view from that mythical future, is therefore itself evocative of a transition period in which the cybernetic self is shifting from being a work of science fiction to a fact of reality. It is the in-betweenness of when Haraway writes—in the digital era, but not of the networked era—that marks out the necessity of her rhetorical approach. Rather than the “appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture” (Haraway 150), or “the tradition of racist, male-dominated capitalism” (Haraway 150), what we instead get is the cyborg as image “outside salvation history” and the idea that “the cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world” (Haraway 151).

As such, Haraway attempts to ground a mythos for post-positionality politics. If “the cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity” as it is “oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence” (Haraway 151), then what it is clear is that, akin to Laclau and Mouffe’s notion of radical democracy,⁵⁰ the cyborg is an attempt to think through a politics not rooted in a specific, group-based identity such as race, gender, sex, sexuality and so on. Unlike Laclau and Mouffe, however, who attempt to resist identity politics through the notion of a “radically democratic” political citizenship, rather than an ethnic nationalist one, the cyborg is instead an attempt to reconfigure how the material body is inserted into relations of exchange. If, as Haraway

asserts, “communications technologies and biotechnologies are the crucial tools recrafting our bodies” (165), then the aim is to foreground the hybrid product of such recrafting, “subverting the structure of desire, the force imagined to generate language and gender, and so subverting the structure and modes of reproduction of ‘Western’ identity, of nature and culture, of mirror and eye, slave and master, body and mind” (Haraway 176). It is through the production of a myth that refuses the logic of “the informatics of domination” that, at the very least, a kind of desire for a *ground* for post-positionality subjectivity is expressed—where here, the ground is a body that cannot be inserted in pre-existing modes of interpellation or domination.

With this in mind, both the usefulness and limits of the cyborg to this project—and its unspoken ubiquity in it—becomes clear. The cyborg myth must function not as simple aspirational pole for a politics that refuses either “community” or “the Oedipal,” but instead as fiction that works backward to manifest its own materialization. The fiction must produce the reality, so to speak. As such, all of the holograms of this project’s contemporary fictions—the simultaneous suspensions of identity that hover in front of Jas/on, Arjun, Dorian, Jane, and so on—are also cyborg myths of a sort: attempts to concretize the thing that does not yet exist, and cannot, but must be forced to (textually) become real. The mythical nature of the cyborg is self-reflexive, in that its fictionality is itself an attempt to elucidate the interpenetration of the material (the body) and the “immaterial” (the fictive or the virtual).

Where the limits of the cyborg metaphor break down, however—thus instead demanding the myth of the holographic self instead—is in the phenomenal ground for the cyborg *as myth*, as opposed to the cyborg as lived material experience. The mythical status of the cyborg, Haraway argues, destabilizes three boundaries: human and animal; animal-human (organism) and machine; and physical and non-physical. It is the last of these three pairings that is most pertinent, because it perhaps most clearly lays out how the material reality of the immaterial that is so familiar now was not available to Haraway at the time of the writing. Her emphasis for the breakdown of physical and non-physical is about scale and size. She suggests that “modern machines are quintessentially microelectronic devices” (153) and that as such “they are everywhere and they are invisible” (153). Even though Haraway asserts that “our best machines are made of sunshine ... because they are nothing but signals, electromagnetic waves, a section of spectrum” (153), their threat is in their erasure of the “cyborg networks of power” (153) and materiality in which these diaphanous machines are produced.

Haraway’s prescience here is breathtaking, as conflict minerals and poor working conditions in factories producing smartphones made by multinationals like Apple and Samsung are still a glaring problem, and the ubiquity of mobile machines is a core dimension of how the digital virtual criss-crosses the material in a profound, mundane, but fundamental manner. Further, the intensification of the ills of post-Fordist capitalism that have occurred through digitality—whether the increasing precarity of labour seen in relation to companies like Uber, or the centralization of new means of production in fewer and fewer hands, such as with journalism’s relation to Facebook—seem to suggest

that the ubiquity of digitality does indeed threaten the revolutionary potential of the cyborg. At the same time however, as I have argued herein, distinctions about what separate the digital virtual from other forms of technologization before it are to be expressed in degrees. This is to say that if, for Haraway, the distinction between physical and non-physical is complicated by a collapse in distinction between human and non-human, it does not quite account for the production of a mimetic sphere in which the representation of the human operating beyond the body as a cyborg subject continues to exist. This sphere functions not as revolutionary alternate space, but the manifestation of the informatics of domination itself. If the dualisms of mind and body, nature and culture, male and female are “broken down” by technology, then what is elided by the cyborg myth is that rather than a *metaphoric* breakdown of the body and mind dualism, what the digital virtual instead does is a strangely ironic reinscription of such dualism in which the partiality of subjectivities finds a representation online, distinct from the body, as also the fact of the representation and its interpenetration with “internal” bodily subjectivity, undercuts the dualism in much the same manner as the cyborg. The alterity of the cyborg was meant to be found in the non-bodily; however, the non-bodily is now to be found on Facebook.

In an epistemological sense, what Haraway is thus “unable” to see is that the materialization of dualisms—the often binary split between a bodily identity and a representative, aesthetic one online that I have invoked in the previous chapters—deprioritizes not just the biological self, but the cyborg-machinic self, too. It is not the machinic cyborg body re-inserted into relations of signification that resist domination,

but both a cyborg body and holographic *non-body*, re-inserted into relations that can both resist *or* reaffirm domination. So the transition here is from cyborg to hologram, from immanence to representation, which rather than being about the technologization of the body, is about the “de-bodying” of subjectivity. When Haraway says that “machines can be prosthetic devices, intimate components” (178), her emphasis remains on a body, be it biological or machinic. By contrast, the hologram as metaphor relies on a thing beyond a body that stands for it, and as such foregrounds the materiality of the “immaterial” representation (which is never perfectly immaterial, as it is never also “immaterial”). This notion of representation, therefore, makes Haraway’s essay so useful, despite it imperfectly lining up with the mainstreaming and commonness of the contemporary internet as a representational field. What it also does, however, is point to the holographic self as a socio-historic phenomenon with no *inherent* revolutionary potential, but rather as a function of a complex set of economic, material, and subjective relations.

All the same, it seems that a certain degree of optimism is to be found in the notion of *writing*. Haraway is intimately concerned with inscriptions and the signification of the body. She argues that “the silicon chip is a surface for writing” (153), but, furthermore, that “writing is pre-eminently the technology of cyborgs ... [because] cyborg politics is struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism” (176). In one sense, then, Haraway’s insistence that cyborg writing operates on “the basis of seizing the tools the mark the world that marked them as other”

(175) is the now-common notion of the re-appropriation of the master's tools⁵¹. But in another, it is also about the overlap between a desire to express an identity “beyond” positionality through the figure of the cyborg in fiction to produce a kind of *cyborg writing* that not only invokes the cyborg as an idea in a rhetorical economy, but instead invokes a kind of cyborg writing as a mode of narrative rhetoric itself.

It is for this reason that I turn to *The Self Wired*, a book by Lisa Yaszek, which began as a doctoral dissertation (self-reflexive optimism of such a gesture noted). Yaszek takes up the question of how literature represents the technologically-mediated subject, with a particular emphasis upon expanding the canon of cyborg writing first proposed by Haraway. In particular, the text is concerned with the effects of two changes: first, that “advanced technologies challenge conventional understandings of the human subject by transforming the body into a conduit between (rather than a protective barrier against) external forces and the internal psyche” (Yaszek 1); and, second, “as the body becomes a kind of permeable interface, technological mediation seems to replace direct organic experience as the subject's primary source of information about itself and the world” (Yaszek 1). Though the latter of these claims stretches things somewhat—in that the mediation of the world through screens still occurs in an embodied manner, such that the subject experiencing the screen is still “in” a body—the links between Yaszek's dissertation and my own are clear. Each project asks how changes in the notion of subjectivity are expressed through and generated by modes of representation.

Yaszek's emphasis, however, is upon the relationship between a model of subjectivity enabled by technology and a mode of writing. As such, the core of the argument is that a certain collection of texts, "by using the figure of the part-organic, part-technological cyborg ... explore the experience of technological mediation ... [and] revise conventional understandings of human identity and agency and, in turn, contribute to the development of a new narrative genre: 'cyborg writing'" (Yaszek 3). Turning to Haraway, Yaszek argues that the notion of the cyborg is trapped between contradictory approaches, one involving how "technologically-mediated subject positions ... serve dominant economic or technological interests at the expense of individual or communal ones" (14) in its subsumption to global capitalist concerns, and the other in which the ironic partiality of the postmodern finds a manifestation in the myth of the machinic self. As such, *The Self Wired* is largely an attempt to ground these contradictory approaches within an emerging literary canon that expresses both facets of technological mediation. Yaszek does this in an intriguing fashion. She first looks at Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* and Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man* in order to argue both novels constitute a subject situated in an "'excluded middle' between personal experience and technological representations" (Yaszek 50), but without being able articulate what subjectivity might look like as that excluded middle reifies into something materially and ideologically grounded. To wit, the argument made is akin to Jameson's famous argument about *Hamlet*: the thing that cannot be represented is the historical moment yet-to-arrive. Yet, when Yaszek looks to cyberpunk, such as Gibson's *Neuromancer* or Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash*, she suggests that each invokes "the traditional romance

or quest” (160) only to then have “protagonists who attempt to live out the dream of transcendence through technology [which] are thwarted by the fact that their work makes them visible to—and thus subject to manipulation by—the very economic and social systems they wish to escape” (160)—suggesting that the hybridized cyborg self itself is no simple vehicle for representations of a future beyond capital.

The point here is that part of what makes a self a cyborg self is its constitution by and through a complex, globalized, material-ideological network that similarly functions by and through representation—whether the representation means to stand for or to speak for. This relation between subject-constitution and representation, I argue, is true for both cyborg and holographic selves. Yet Yaszek’s project is perhaps most relevant to mine when it examines Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*, a science fiction narrative in which an interracial couple move back and forth through time, from the present of the nineteen eighties to slavery-era America. The plot revolves around the necessity of Dana nurturing a young white boy in the past in order to secure the timeline of her family history in the present, a narrative which is predicated upon mediating a relationship between a material history of race relations and late twentieth-century media representations of that history. Here, Yaszek argues that the protagonist, Dana, is forced to produce a hybrid identity in which she “must redefine African-American subjectivity itself as a complex and often contradictory phenomenon that emerges at the interface *between* seemingly discrete opposites such as black and white (and, by extension, other seemingly discrete opposites such experience and narrative, past and present, and slave and free agent)” (92). Such cyborg identities “learn to use their physically and culturally marked

bodies as the site from which to tell new stories about African-American history and identity” (Yaszek 95), and do so through producing a relational space between a past and present that is mediated through technology. The organic-machinic hybridity of the cyborg is mirrored and mapped onto a cultural hybridity that interfaces between binaries.

This mediation operates through the construction of a materially accessible fictional past, which then works in relation with a fictional, shifting present. The production of a hybrid subjectivity that potentially destabilizes essentialized categories relies on and requires the fictional trope of time travel. As such, one of the things that distinguishes a cyborg from a holographic self is that the latter operates by assuming the socio-historical presence of an analogously alternate, generative space that is not simply accessible in a “fictional” sense, such as in the idea of time travel, but rather, that is available, if perhaps only discursively, as a common social fact. More simply, the fictionalized textual spaces of alterity invoked by a novel like *Kindred* find an analogous space in the digital virtual, which, I argue, then evokes a changed conception of subjectivity in which the relational operation of the movement between subjectivity and a space of self-representation becomes crucial to any notion of subjective identity. Put another way: Octavia Butler must invoke a narrative of time travel; Hari Kunzru must simply talk about a thing called “the internet.” As such, differing from Yaszek, my emphasis on the figure of the holographic self, rather than the cyborg, is initially focused less on a genre or mode of writing, but instead traces how the function of self-representation shifts as those representations turn digital, either literally or in terms of a

logic. Furthermore, rather than relying on analogous spaces for the virtual—or historical predecessors like the painting of *Dorian Gray*, or the imaginative horizon of *Jane Eyre*—the holographic self is a product of the web as socio-historical fact widely available to billions, rather than an imaginative space of “a virtual” that then functions as narrative device. Rather than an emphasis upon the figure of the cyborg and the notion of a “whole” self, now reconfigured as simultaneously organic and machinic, with the attendant ramifications for other forms of hybridity, my focus is upon the acts and function of self-representations in relation to—or, indeed, in self-relation to—narratives of self-actualization. In a sense, the division is about what I call the ironic reinscription of mind-body dualism: that the socio-material efficacy of the holographic self comes from the simultaneous interpenetration of bodily and digital, *and* their spatio-temporal scattering that enables the production of the translucent hologram.

In a sense, the difference is where one finds oneself in the chain of argumentation. If Yaszek’s emphasis is on how literature articulates a response to the incorporation of machine into the body, then mine is perhaps a step prior in a linear sequence, examining how literature expresses the idea of a “cyborg” self that incorporates the discourse of an extra-bodily holographic representation of self in order to arrive at the changed notions of subjectivity that Yaszek argues are enabled by technology. In essence, the contrast is that I am specifically interested in the discursive-material basis that grounds any potential sense of a “new subjectivity” which then in turn enables a genre of writing in which these notions of subjectivity are explored. It is also perhaps for this reason that my concern has been with texts in which digital technology does not play

a defining role, as I am less interested in the technology itself than its epistemological effects. It thus makes sense now to more explicitly relate what I mean by the concept of a holographic self, after which I would like to return briefly to the literary texts of this project in order to both recap and reframe what each is suggesting about digital technology's impact upon a kind of post-internet subjectivity.

If the hologram is a figure of digital self-representation, it is also a figure of digital self-relation. Within this project I have invoked two differing forms of holographic selves, one about the relation between a body and self-representation as phantasmatic desire, and the other about internal self-relation of subjectivity in which a self is a non-linear constellation of movement. Returning to Descartes and Ong, it is the relation between projections of self and the ambivalently “interior” experience of subjectivity that both constitute the models of selfhood I am examining but also suggesting changes somewhat in relation to digital. The difference between the two models of digital self-relation, however, is perhaps best understood as the distinction between internal-external relations, and internal-internal relations, the dynamic existing between a subjectivity and a representation, and internal representations *as* subjectivity.

To elucidate further this notion of the holographic self as a model of subjectivity that foregrounds a relationship between a subjective consciousness and a set of digital extra-bodily representations, a turn to James Elwell's 2014 article, “The Transmediated Self,” helps. Elwell attempts to think through digitally mediated subjectivity in relation to the phenomenon of transmedia, which he suggests is “a way of telling stories across

multiple media platforms to create an overarching story-world where each narrative element makes a distinct contribution to the whole” (239). Returning to *Star Wars* as an example, the canonical expression of a given fictional universe is the virtual amalgam of all those narrativized expressions—an approach for which the George Lucas franchise is both famous and infamous. Elwell argues that transmedia is “integrated, dispersed, episodic and interactive” (242). The connection to the digital self is likely clear even at this point, but Elwell’s elucidation is still helpful. Turning to the “Future of Identity” report commissioned by the United Kingdom’s Government Office for Science, Elwell notes that “parts of identity will reside in a persistent ‘exoself’ of information and software” (Bostrom and Sandberg 2011: 4). The exoself mirrors the notion of the avatar of a digital self I have invoked, and Elwell quite usefully expands on the report’s idea to suggest that “there is not a single ‘exoself’ of information” (237). Instead of a singular relation between a digital identity and a representation elsewhere, “there are many exoselves, existing as a network of digital identities that increasingly bear an existential equivalence to embodied, analog identity” (237). As such, and relative to my assertion that a holographic self functions through a constellational arrangements of sites of subjectivity, Elwell adds to the notion by stating that our “multiple digital identities—Facebook profiles, LinkedIn identities, Tumblr portfolios, YouTube channels, blogs and more... [together] constitute a networked ecosystem of digital selves” (237). The criss-crossed interpenetration of this ecosystem of selfhood constitutes a networked subjectivity in which a significant dimension of self is found in extra-bodily sites of

representation which, in their temporal simultaneity with a bodily self, constitute a virtual self as an amalgam of these various identities.

Elwell then argues that describing this burgeoning notion of selfhood in terms of transmedia helps to articulate its characteristics in useful terms. Laying out the aspects of transmedia, Elwell states that “the transmediated self describes the integrated, dispersed, episodic and interactive narrative identity experience in this space between the virtual and the real” (243), such that those aspects of transmedia in which a dispersed collection of narrative forms a virtual canonical whole can be analogously mapped onto the narrativization of these self. As such, the digital self is integrated because “the question of digital/analog interface ... becomes increasingly meaningless as both are folded into expanding the ‘in-betweenness’ of onlife as identity itself becomes a porous membrane between the digital and analog” (244). To this point I would add that it is the simultaneity and overlap of both digital and analog experience—such as the experience of “having two conversations at once” while sitting at a table across from someone, while also using one’s smartphone—that “integrates” the two fields into subjective experience, thus producing *integration through a split*. The notion of the amalgam thus relies on a spatio-temporal dispersion, a scattering across sites and moments that means that which is integrated is also composed of differing parts. As such, when Elwell suggests that the “transmediated self is dispersed across multiple media platforms” (244), he also suggests that it is the narrativization-of-self—often by the self to self—that in fact does the integrating. As such, this scattered self “never appears all at once and is thus never entirely knowable” quite simply because “not only is there so single *place* (virtual or real)

where the transmediated self is entirely present, but because ... neither is there a single *time* when the transmediated self is entirely present” (Elwell 244). Both the synchronic and diachronic axes are necessary to comprehend the transmediated self as something resembling “a whole,” even as it obviously refutes the completion of any such idea. It is for this reason that Elwell focuses upon the episodic nature of the transmediated self as, drawing on the work of Galen Strawson in “Against Narrativity,” he suggests that “the present self is experienced as an ‘episode’, which is connected to past and future episodes of the self by virtue of shared corporeality and yet is isolated from such episodes in that the present state of self is an interior state distinct from all such similarly interior selves/states that correspond to past and future episodic (self) experiences” (245). What digitality does to this argument, however, is that “discrete episodes are translated into serial (narrative) activities” (245), and I would add that what is key to any sense of this narrativization is its manifestation in aesthetic, material ways. The production of a visual memory, not only of images, but also text, intersubjective communications, avatars, and amalgams of this and more, produce a certain degree of dislocation, manifesting the fundamental incompatibility of “versions of self” through a materially-rooted network. If there is a difference to this notion in digital, it is in the interpenetration of these episodes with the present through the aesthetic-material dimensions of social media.

The notion of the transmediated self is useful not only because it posits a “virtual” notion of the self that is constituted by a relation between varying expressions of narrativization. It is also so because it lends itself well to the Lacanian model of the digital virtual as interface for fantasy espoused by Andre Nusselder that I examined in the

introduction. Furthermore, it also is perhaps most helpful when discussing my analyses of the texts in chapters one and two. When Elwell writes about the “interactive” nature of the transmediated self, he is referring to recognition of self that comes from having a persistent audience. As such, “while everything we do online has an audience... we [also] want an audience of participants ... we invite to contribute to the story of our selves” (Elwell 246). As such, Elwell argues that “the transmediated self resembles an interactive performance... integrated around an ongoing dialectic of identity formation” (246). Again, keeping in mind the difference of the digital is always a question of degrees, the emphasis here is upon the desire to be constituted by representation of the Other that constitutes “the audience.”

Yet, what is also so useful about the notion of self akin to a kind of transmedia is that it foregrounds both the aesthetical and narrativ dimensions of that self—that the constellational arrangement of a self in relation to self-representation is, in effect, an ongoing narrativization of subjectivity in relation to an aesthetic stand-in, representation, or simulacrum of that self. In doing so, that relation—or self-relation—posits a subjectivity that is not “digital” or “virtual” in some simplistic fashion, as if it exists independently in an extra-bodily plane. Rather, the relationality of the relation, so to speak, emphasizes the non-hierarchical interpenetration of physical, textual, imagistic, and digital dimensions of self. What the transmedia self as a concept also does, however, is return one to not only the emphasis upon the spatio-temporal dimensions of self-representation that I focused upon in reference to Descartes and Ong, but also Andre Nusselder’s notion of the digital as interface for fantasies of self. After all, the notions of a

dispersed and episodic self raised by Elwell form a useful metaphor for not only the spatio-temporal arrangement of a body operating in relation to a self-representation in digital space, but also the psychoanalytic dimensions of the representations, which can take on a phantasmatic quality. The narrativization is the process of fantasy.

Nusselder suggests that the Lacanian predication of his work rests on the idea that “we always anticipate the future on the basis of ideal images: being someone else, being somewhere else” (70). As such, in the idea that “the imaginary order thus introduces a distinction between the Inside and the Outside of the subject” (Nusselder 86)—thus also causing a duplication of “the lived ‘inner body’ and the body surface” (Nusselder 86)—what is clear is that the Lacanian dimension of the holographic self means that the hologram of self-representation is an ideal ego image, something that Nusselder argues produces a virtual unity between self and projection. I would thus suggest that Nusselder’s emphasis upon digitality as interface between realms or orders of experience—“real” vs. Fictional, or interior vs. Exterior, the symbolic and the imaginary—not only maps itself well onto the narrative-centric spatial metaphor of the transmediated self, but also it is particularly suited to a model of digital becoming that emphasizes just that: becoming—the movement toward a horizon of actualization that never fully arrives, in part because the very dispersion of the transmediated self defies a singular point of finality that one then might call “*the self*.” In that sense, the transmediated self as self-presentation is important to this dissertation because it functions in relation to what that “dispersion” of selves across time and space does to becoming-self for the protagonists of these texts—namely, that it interrupts a simple

one-to-one relationship between the legible texts of a subject and “an identity.” That transmediated holographic self, when narrativized, results in a hologram that can function as aspirational pole or conduit (or both at once)—but which crucially forms a subjective tactical deployment of the cyborg myth. To be clear, subjugated peoples can’t simply choose who they want to be as if it were a solely voluntary expression, as Sarah Upstone argues about *Londonstani* (211); rather, that the holographic dimensions of the holographic self function as desirous of a tactical intervention into structures of normativity. Whether or not they “work” is one thing; what they stand for in terms of the desire for a site of subjectivity that exceeds the policing of the body, but that has material effects not available to “internal” imaginings is quite another. It is this same phenomenon lets the hologram also work as obfuscatory tactic in both *Londonstani* and *Dorian Gray* (and also *Open City*, but in a different way).

The collected aggregation of dispersed selves stands for “a new self,” the grouping of bodily and avatar identities coming to stand in as a multiple representation under a single taxonomic signifier. As such, and in return to the progression of novels in this project, the transmediated self as phantasmatic interface actually seems to more “applicable” to the novels in which the protagonists arrive at a particular point or telos than those in which the texts deliberately foreclose a recognition of either a clear identity for the protagonist, or an ending at all. Consider *Londonstani*: What I suggested in the chapter is that the phenomenal ground of the internet underpins the epistemology or logic of the text. More specifically, the internet is not just a thing so named and evoked by the text’s logic. It is an arena for action that predicates intersubjectivity on semiotic

exchange—that in the production of a space for representing a self as a configuration of disembodied, sometimes non-chirographic signs, the notion of self-as-text takes on a different character. A text-self is not only about a body-as-text. It is about identity as a series of spatio-temporally distinct collections of identity—avatars, online personas, textual identities. Jas/on is a body and a projection in tandem—not one text, but a meta-text of texts-of-identity. The holographic nature of his identity is precisely the relationship between what Nusselder calls an “inner identity” and the textual projection of self that is itself enabled by the meta-textual construction of self through *text*. It is exactly the creation of self as a text-ual being that foregrounds a specific ideal of subjectivity because it manifests the metaphor of the hologram itself: the extra-bodily aesthetic presentation of self is a core dimension of at least one version of “a Self.”

There is, in this structure, undoubtedly a desire for a kind of transcendence at work. It is the desire to “exceed” race that runs through the text, but in a deeply ambivalent way, as it is precisely the white privilege of choice afforded Jas/on that allows him to adopt the kind of hybrid identity invoked by the text’s close, without the “racial penalty” that comes with brown skin. In fact, for precisely this reason *A Picture of Dorian Gray* was such a useful contrast and foil. The supernatural power that sustains Dorian’s youth literally shapes his body—or perhaps prevents its mis-shapening—in a manner analogous to interpenetration of the digital and bodily identity Elwell refers to in his explication of the transmediated self. What differs, however, is that if the true transmediated self cannot be located at a single site or “exoself,” then Dorian eventually *must* be located a singular, specific body located within discursive practice. If the

imaginary dimensions of self also foreshadow the arrival of the self-to-come—and the self-to-come as the self-wishes-to-be, consciously or not—then the structure of *A Picture of Dorian Gray* reveals a key difference: that there is a conceivable field to produce *and then maintain materially* the self as psychological projection, not an extra-bodily space for non-normative inter/subjectivity. What differs in *Londonstani* is thus that the text invokes a notion of self in which the holographic ideal of the simultaneity of, to use Elwell’s vocabulary, an endo- and exo-self is sustained by one what might call the “epistemological availability” of a virtual field in which the exoself that exceeds the normative-ized body is thus home to desire to exceed race-as-construct or race-as-stricture.

As I have argued, the production of this kind of narrative logic relies on a invocation of race that, while intriguingly anti-essentialist, seems to skip over the unequal distribution and capacity to enact power. Yet, what such a narrative also does is to think through what kind of “material” effects are engendered by the suddenly common phenomenon of extra-bodily sites of subjectivity, or exoselves. The dispersion of self amongst these sites is itself foregrounded on a temporal movement between these sites—an in-time flux, overlap, and interpenetration of the exo- and endoself, which in *Londonstani* is conceived of in terms of a virtual “whole self” composed of the multiple constellation. To an extent, *Transmission* follows this model. Like *Londonstani*, Arjun’s bodily identity exists in relation to an extra-bodily, imagistic/aesthetic construction that stands in for Arjun in certain systems of exchange, but which like Jas/on’s textualized identity, allows him to skirt certain social strictures placed upon the body. If Jas/on’s

cyborg nature is expressed in the relational connection between a bodily and virtuo-aesthetic identity, then Arjun's is more explicitly about a technologized self—such as Arjun's own conception of the world and human relationships as akin to software, or in the conflation of Leela Zahir and the Leela virus—and how this code-ification of self is itself related not only to the actualization of Arjun, but also his dispersion across space and time. What differs between the two novels is the hologram, the virtuo-aesthetic construct of subjectivity that operates in a liminal state of being. While *Londonstani* eventually discards the hologram to return to the body, *Transmission* instead expresses the opposite desire: for the hologram to supersede the body in the imagination, of both text and the readers' experience of it.

For most of the novel, Arjun exists in relation to a digitally-inflected public self—a hologram which operates as a stand-in for Arjun, coming to supersede what the text constructs as "Arjun." Yet, in the coda, a section of the text to which I paid particular attention in chapter two, Arjun the Idea comes to supersede any assumed unity between body and projection. Put another way, rather than the dialectical movement of body and projection toward an assumed telos, the "telos" of *Transmission* operates in an ambivalent relation to the notion of teleology itself. If I argued that Arjun ends the text as something closely akin to the Deleuzian notion of the Idea, then the holographic self cannot only be conceived of in Nusselder's psychoanalytic terms, in no small part because the novel seems to at least express a desire to levitate and move across the interface as boundary line, into both digital virtual and Deleuzian Virtual space, leaving the subject, at least in narrative terms, as "virtual."

This is why, I think, that in addition to foregrounding the digital as interface between fantasy and body, the holographic self as a concept can also be about inverting the notion of relationality itself—or perhaps, at least its novelty—and instead positing the multiplicity of a *flattened* constellational arrangement of sites of subjectivity as epistemologically prior, and then inserting the hologram within that matrix of identity. By this process, I mean that instead of binary, teleological model of body-hologram, the holographic self can *also* be considered as multiple structure of multiple relation. As such, the mode of representation that is of concern is less about an analogous “holographic writing”—which would itself be a model of processing information in which the reader mediates a historical moment through fiction—than about the holographic self-representation, which is the idea of self-inscription and self-reading that is at the core of the holographic as a mode of what I call self-interpellation. The difference here is one of hermeneutic frames, as in my study the focus is on the digital virtual as field of self-representation.

As a result, since the emphasis is upon subjectivity either in relation to a representation, or subjectivity *as* relation, a key question is that of *mediation*, an issue that for my purposes I think is brilliantly elucidated by Alexander Galloway in his chapter “Love of the Middle” in *Excommunication*, a text he shares with scholars Eugene Thacker and McKenzie Wark. In it, Galloway posits three modes of mediation based on three mythic figures: Hermes, Iris, and The Furies, each of which is ostensibly mapped onto three types of critical practice: hermeneutics and “traditional” interpretation that rests upon signification and semiotics and relates to Hermes; Iris, which might be loosely said

to be concerned with both the image and affect; and finally, *The Furies*, which attempts to map out not only a critical rhizomatic practice, but also by extension to assert that rhizomatics are the appropriate model for not only networks, but also digitality itself. I would argue Galloway produces this tripartite analytic structure as part of a larger project to think about the mediating effect of differing media, a topic I engaged in the introduction in my discussion of his *The Interface Effect*.

Excommunication as a book tries to engage how to think about both media and mediation—or, rather, media as mediation. The authors, questioning the prefix “new” that is attached to the term “new media,” argue that “Media are transformative. They affect conditions of possibility in general. Mediation does not merely add something to the existing list of topics that scholars study. It changes the practice of study itself” (Galloway, Thacker and Wark 1). The argument here is that new media—and, by extension, digitality—as object of study cannot be understood solely as an evolution of past media; they must instead be considered as “*conceptual objects* in their own right” (Galloway et al 2). This claim is clearly a departure from Nusselder, who instead would prefer to examine how the digital manifests and modifies psychic structures and processes, and my own work here, which has tended to think about digitality as a concentration or expansion of certain effects, but not a producer of entirely new ones. But for my purposes, that emphasis on newness is most interesting because of the contrast Galloway sets up between modes of mediation—and consequently, that certain modes of mediation arise interdependently from and with certain modes of media. To wit, Galloway posits three types of mediation. The first is “communication in the

workaday sense, mediation as extension, transit, representation, reflection, mimicry, and alienation” (*Excommunication* 28). This Galloway associates with the classical figure Hermes, from whose name the term hermeneutics is derived, in order to foreground the traditional literary practice of engaging representation as semiotic practice. Second is what Galloway calls, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, “*pure and true communication ... found in communion, immediacy, and immanence*” (*Excommunication* 29, original emphasis). This he associates with Iris, “and from here we gain the concept of *iridescent communication*” (Galloway *Excommunication* 29), a concept meant to refer to the “pre-critical immanence” of affective or pre-cognitive reaction. The introduction to the book suggests that iridescence here harkens back to Marshall McLuhan’s notion that light is pure information, that “light is *the* medium of all media” (Galloway et al 13, original emphasis). Finally, there is the “multiplicity of communication, a complex affair in which the communicative infrastructure itself dilates and reduplicates to such a degree that it extinguishes any sort of middle whatsoever (and with it any sort of media)” (Galloway, *Excommunication* 29). The avatars of this mode are The Furies, “the most rhizomatic of the divine forms” (Galloway, *Excommunication* 29), and the authors here suggest that “infuriation” works best for “complex systems like swarms, assemblages, and networks” (Galloway, *Excommunication* 29). What is clear is that a kind of connection is made between rhizomatic theoretical networks and the rhizomatic material networks of the digital.

Galloway’s working through of these concepts is truly a virtuosic bit of theorizing that is also a genuine pleasure to read. A thorough and worthy examination would

require more space than I can allot in this already inappropriate diversion. Yet I invoke Galloway's thoughts here because I believe that, at the end of this project, they help crystallize the movement of these texts from one model of the holographic to another—from the holographic self as hermeneutic-iridescent relation of body-hologram, to holographic self as iridescent-infuriated relation of the self as network. I use these hyphenated terms to highlight that the division is not absolute, and that in both the imagistic nature of the iridescent—its emphasis on affect and the supplement of the image—is combined with either the textual emphasis of hermeneutics or the rhizome. More specifically, however, the transition in *Transmission* from primary narrative to coda that I have argued operates as a hinge from one mode of the holographic to another invokes two differing modes of self-relation: firstly, hermeneutic-iridescent, and then secondly, iridescent-infuriated. It is thus the transition point between the hologram as a binary relation between interior and exterior and the hologram as rhizomatic self-relation among nodes.

In both *Londonstani* and *Transmission*, the texts express a desire for a space in which this complex, internally interdependent system of positionality, speaking, and a material-ideological context is destabilized. To be completely clear, I do not mean this statement in a “humanistic” sense of a pure individual divorced from identity categories or institutional or ideological circumscription, nor in the notion of a universal subject that just happens to adhere to the ideal of a sovereign Western self. Rather, that the digital virtual field operates as an additional node in the relational, dialectical structure of selfing in which the existence of an extra-bodily field of self-representation that not

only produces material effects but is also available to broad swaths of the population, suggests the possibility that subject position as location on a grid is complicated as one of the axes of (self)identification can operate in a field in which race is temporarily and sporadically obscured. To invoke Galloway's useful ideas, positionality is best understood as "hermeneutics"—about the body as text, a collection of socially marked signifiers that is subject to the same "exteriority," as all signification is. The digital virtual invoked as "an epistemology" in these texts suggests that at the same time that Hermes is at work, there is an "iridescent" quality to digital interaction— affective, immediate, pre-critical—that still produces, if you will excuse the term, affective effects. Jas/on's movement through the narrative is a journey towards a telos of self-actualization that is arrived at by its "temporary escape" from normative racial categories. One might then argue that both that text and *Transmission* invoke a logic of the digital in which subjects undergo "virtual" experiences that, despite their "immaterial" nature, form part of the processes of self-actualization, small, micro-escapes from positionality as, almost instantly, they are looped back into networks of normativity. Even then, the momentary is still, in terms of its potential, momentous, and for the reasons I have outlined numerous times throughout this project, I would argue that wide "availability" of this logic is the function of the digital, if not necessarily unique to it in an abstract or epistemological sense.

What I thus argue here is that a logic of post-digital identity which I call holographic subjectivity underpins the contemporary texts of this dissertation. Furthermore, the incorporation of holographic self-representation enables a kind of affective self-representation that, in its temporary and provisional escapes from networks

of normativity, enables a process of subject-constitution that is less bound to fixed and potentially essentialized notions of identity.

Yet, because I have no desire to end on some utopian ideal of the digital—some vague and now thoroughly discredited notion that it will “set us free”—and because I have yet to return to it here, some (re)consideration of *Pattern Recognition* and *Open City* is also necessary. In a sense, as I suggested in the introduction, *Open City*, besides being a fine novel, represents two things to this project: a counterbalance or corrective to the notion that any kind of logic of post-digital subjectivity might neatly or simply engender increased possibilities of self-actualization; and secondly, that the recognition of both the subject and subjectivity is dispersed across various socio-temporal sites, with ambivalent consequence. My emphasis in chapter three was upon recognition and identity—that rather than finding a kind of unity in body and hologram, instead one can often find instead is disjuncture, contradiction, and irreconcilable difference collapsed within to the same concept subsumed under the concept “subject.” What I suggested through my use of Brian Massumi’s *Parables of the Virtual: Sensation, Affect, Movement* is that *Open City* invokes “the bleed” of self into self-concept, and self into the self-constructed narrativized construct of self that Massumi so elegantly outlined in this discussion of Ronald Reagan’s process of recognizing himself as a construction on-screen.

Yet, at the end of this work, that collapse of a concept into itself seems key. In chapters one and two, the texts function in a largely linear fashion and operate on the logic of arrival at a particular, recognizable concept of self. *Open City*, on the other hand,

does not. Indeed, unlike *Pattern Recognition*, in which the patterns are in fact recognized, made sense of, and then neatly subsumed into a concept of whole self, *Open City* does something quite different, particularly to the notion of the holographic self as a form of self-relation. To wit, and to return to Alexander Galloway's eminently useful definitions, *Open City* narratively maps out holographic self-relation as mediated in the mode of infuriation. To add my own term to this, rather than the hermeneutic-imagistic emphasis of *Londonstani* and *Transmission*, we are instead left with the self as relation to self-image in the mode of The Furies, while still embroiled in the affective mode of Iris.

Galloway suggests that The Furies are what exist "after Hermes and Iris" — that instead of those modes of mediation, "there is another divine form of pure mediation, *the distributed network*" (*Excommunication* 56, my emphasis). Looking at Galloway's other work, it is hardly a coincidence that Galloway employs the terms of the digital network, and does so in largely Deleuzian vocabulary as well—that, echoing Hayles, they signal "an abdication of both presence and difference" and instead evoke "multiplicity, heterogeneity, parallelity, rhizomatics, horizontal topology, complexity, and nonlinear systems" (*Excommunication* 57). Maybe most interestingly for my purposes, however, is that Galloway, suggesting that "Deleuze is something of a patron saint for the Fury mode," then states that "the univocity of being consists in pure multiplicity" (*Excommunication* 58). In a sense, then, and in a markedly different way than I have deployed the term thus far, the Furies or infuriation is the Virtual-ized mode of mediation—a mode of interacting between states or fields that always assumes the primacy of multiplicity as the starting point (i.e. there is no starting point), and each

moment of actualization as a provisional subtraction. Putting it somewhat differently, Galloway suggests that the rhizomatic nature of *The Furies* embody “the non-human form most completely” (*Excommunication* 63) and “violently reduce mind to matter, disseminating consciousness and causality into a frenzy of discrete, autonomous agents, each with their own microfunctions” (63). Even in the “univocity of multiplicity” it is precisely the multiplicity, and not the *uni*-vocity that is important.

What does this have claim to do with the notion of the holographic self? It is that if, as I have suggested, the relation of bodily identity and digital avatar is a core dimension of the holographic self, then the mode of infuriation is the “correct” one through which to see those representations of self that are not virtualized in the sense of telos or actualization, but that become virtual in their inversion of a mode that prioritizes the primacy of a body as the focal point of both subjectivity and subject position—and also deprioritize the location of identity at a freeze-frame node. In such a mode, the hologram manifests the multiplicity inherent in a self-as-network: a self as matrix of nodes arranged in non-linear and non-hierarchical relation, but crucially, that such a matrix is not conceived as metaphor, but both material and imaginative network of “actual” sites of subjectivity that stand for the subject in material-historically grounded systems of exchange. Further, if the epistemological ground of a post-digital subject is predicated upon the existence of the digital, then *Open City* also maps out the spatio-temporal dispersion of self that locates sites of subjectivity at various points—in memory, in the consciousness of the other, in the meta-textual acts of self-representation that are so prominent in the novel and so on, and most importantly, as movement. Further, the

notion of a multiple self is also narratively mapped out through the flickering of Julius, now one thing and then another. It is a logic of self predicated on the holographic, but not the same logic deployed in *A Portrait of Dorian Gray/Londonstani*, *Jane Eyre/Transmission*, or even, ultimately, *Pattern Recognition*. It is instead a logic of self inflected by the epistemology of the digital, which is itself not limited to digitality itself, but to a twenty-first century logic that invokes the digital virtual as a mode of being.

Yet, it is important to note that in invoking these two models of the holographic self, what I am attempting to do is to establish one possible analytic frame for holographic subjectivity. It is not that one might, in an absurd fashion, go about marking certain narratives or subjects as belonging to one or the other model of subjectivity which foregrounds a relational structure either to or within digitality. Rather, it is that these texts differently foreground contrasting dimensions of holographic subjectivity, while not at all precluding an alternate reading. For example, though I argue that the trajectory of *Londonstani* is most convincingly understood as a relation of fantasy between a body and an idealized tactical hologram, the novel could also be fruitfully read through as a rhizomatic self-relation of numerous expressions of identity operating in flux. The point is that the holographic self is always operating in multiple registers and orders. What is key is the foundational nature of the relational structure of body and hologram. How that relation is arranged is a lens for understanding which particular ideas of the subject and subjectivity a particular narrative deploys. Fantasy and rhizome may, from certain perspectives, be theoretically at odds, but they are both a part of the holographic self.

I should at this point move toward some kind of actual, more traditional conclusion to this strangely “introductory conclusion.” Before I do, however, I would like to return briefly to Massumi’s *Parables for the Virtual*, to further this notion of an end that acts as a glass “corrective lens.” In the chapter on *Open City*, I suggested that Massumi’s chapter “The Bleed” elucidated the functioning of a “subject as object,” the production of self through techne of self-representation manifesting the process of “self-self-constitution” as an aesthetic-textual happening. In such an idea, the hologram is the thing produced and lived-in-relation-to, and the holographic self is the relation—the non-hierarchical and non-symmetrical amalgam of a body and one or many avatars. What I would also like to do, however, is to link back to the notion of positionality or subject position that I invoked through my reference to Donna Haraway, by quickly considering the implications of Massumi’s chapter on “The Political Economy of Belonging.” In this short chapter, Massumi explores how to think about the subject and society in mutual relations of emergence—and, with predictable strangeness, arrives at the metaphor of a soccer pitch. Looking at individuals and societies, Massumi says: “it is an absurdity even to speak of them using notions of mediation, as if they were discrete entities that enter in to extrinsic relation to one another” (71). Massumi’s emphasis on the titular “sensation, affect, and movement,” then, is an attempt to ground in both concept and vocabulary the paradigmatic-as-ongoing-process—that rather than the syntagmatic as analytically or even “bio-mentally” necessary tool, what is philosophically necessary is to think about multiplicity-in-time. Put another way, however, it is to try and think through the interstitial spaces in the grid of subject position. I mean this not just as spatial metaphor,

which is the argument I have made about Jas/on in *Londonstani*, in which a subject occupies various points on a grid linking bodies and identities. Instead, I mean it in a temporal sense too, focusing in on the manner in which one might articulate a subject-in-time without always being looped back into an analytic framework that can only discuss a subject “out of time”—that is, a subject expressed as a series of points on a grid without foregrounding or acknowledging the constant, inevitable movement between those points on a grid. In a sense, this kind of “syntagmatic” analysis produces a partiality that is at odds with the partiality that Massumi invokes: one that, rather than thinking of a subject in an impermanent state of mutual co-emergence with its many objects-in-motion with its potentiality in flux, instead sacrifices potentiality for what is undoubtedly also a very necessary and historically vital emphasis on subject position. This is the freeze-frame that Massumi argues so vociferously against. After all, the impetus for his argument is found in the introduction, trying to resist “a subject ‘constructed’ by external mechanisms. ‘The Subject’” (2). Here he invokes “positionality,” in which “signifying subject formation according to the dominant structure was often thought of in terms of ‘coding’” (2) and that further:

Coding in turn came to be thought of in terms of positioning on a grid.

The grid was conceived as an oppositional framework of culturally-constructed significations: male versus female, black versus white, gay versus straight, and so on. A body corresponded to a “site” on the grid defined by an overlapping of one term from each pair. The body came to be defined by its pinning to the grid.

Proponents of this model often cited its ability to link body-sites into a “geography” or culture that tempered the universalizing tendencies of ideology.

The sites, it is true, are multiple. But aren't they still combinatorial permutations on an overarching definitional framework? Aren't the possibilities for the entire gamut of cultural emplacements, including the "subversive" ones, precoded into the ideological master structure? Is the body as linked to a particular subject position anything more than a local embodiment of ideology? Where has the potential for change gone? How does a body perform its way out of a definitional framework that is not only responsible for its very “construction,” but seems to prescript every possible signifying and countersignifying move as a selection from a repertoire of possible permutations on a limited set of predetermined terms? How can the grid itself change? (Massumi 3).

It is a long passage, but it clearly articulates what Massumi is working against. It is perhaps a too-glib reaction to the Linguistic Turn, a repetition of the constant worry that has lingered for decades now: yes, but what about reification? Yet I invoke it here because, essentially, what Massumi tries to do is to “give a logical consistency to the in-between”—a thing he suggests is not “a middling being but a being *of* the middle ... a relation that has an ontological status separate from the terms of that relation” (*Parables* 70). Perhaps there is a meta-textual quality to this yearning in relation to this dissertation: that Massumi wants to move past the reification of the “the grid,” just as each of this project’s focal texts express a desire to move past positionality.

I would argue that Galloway's terminology and thought provide a way of thinking through relations as not constituting terms as extrinsic to a relation itself. Nonetheless, Massumi's idea here is to try and *not* think through the subject's constitution by "society"—because that would be largely redundant at this point—but instead to try and map out the temporality and movement of a subject and society in a mutual state of co-emergence. It is the in-time nature of Massumi that is key. This is why he arrives at that metaphor of the soccer ball, which he first suggests is the "subject of the play" (73) but quickly modifies to say that, rather, "the subject is the displacements of the ball and the continual modifications of the field of potential all those displacements effect" (73). Massumi then goes on to make a complex argument about the co-dependent nature of not only the "structural" aspects that enable the game—the field, the lines of play, the rules, the spectators, the referees and so on—but importantly, then, also suggest that these kind of "event-spaces" or fields of occurrence are transformed somewhat by their representation both in and as media. Focusing in on television as technologically mediating event spaces, Massumi lands on the notion of event transitivity, which he argues "is a dominant mode of power in what some are apt to call the postmodern condition" (86), and that "its network is what connects coding to coding, codification to codification, coding to codification, and each to its own repetitions in an ebb and flow of potentialization-and-containment" (86)—all of which is a very dense way of pointing to the territorialization or subsumption of a code into structures of power and representation, but without the linearity of process such a description implies. Yet, when Massumi argues that "communicational technologies *give body to relationality as such*

and a set in motion—as the passing-on of the event” (86, original emphasis), he elucidates a complex notion of the subject-object in a continual process of co-emergence: one that, in a way, almost inadvertently alludes to Bhabha’s spinning chapatis⁵². Yet, the emphasis upon technologies of representation also points to the interpenetrative nature of representations of self in the event-field of becoming. Massumi suggests that a state of emergence cannot be thought of separately from structures of power and representation as they exist in time. Importantly, though, “interstitial subjectivity” is a momentary (re)happening that occurs in constant tension-filled relation to structures of power and (self)representation that obscure that interstitial-ness. Additionally, the representation of a subject- or object-event in technologies of transmission under capitalism is a form of control in which “decoding and deterritorialization, *delivered*” (88) from the basis of how control is modulated. The ambivalence or potentiality of emergence is doubly subsumed: first by territorialization, but secondly through its (re)transmission or transitivity through technologies of communication. It is the movement between technologies of representation and the body-as-object that manifest a temporality of “movement” as an epistemological mode of understanding. In expanding the sites of expression for the subject-as-object, one also institutes as phenomenal experience movement between those sites.

Such an argument is reason for pause in this project, for Massumi then argues that this subsumption of potentiality—which, following the Deleuzian vocabulary, is not the same as possibility—is the usurpation of “becoming-together” and “belonging” (88), a form of capitalist control that works through the “worldwide trafficking in modulation

the stylization of power” (88). That is to say that the “potentiality of interstitiality” that is elucidated through the metaphor of the soccer field is subject to as much control as it is a source of newness. But why, then, is this argument here at all? Why is Massumi’s work relevant to this project on holographic subjectivity and its expression in holographic cyborg writing? I would say that, here at the end, it is because of this: Massumi’s careful laying out of the temporal and discursive “in-between” overlaps at various points with the notion of the holographic subject that I have invoked in this project. The internet and World Wide Web as both structures and ideas can, I argue, materialize and make (holographically) visible the relations that mutually constitute the part-subject, part-object, and phenomenal-epistemological ground in co-existent simultaneous relation and emergence. The holographic self is a mediated relation between bodily and embodied, interior and exterior, a body-as-text and self-representation-as-text/image, if and when the latter of those pairings exhibits the characteristics of the digital virtual. Yet, in each of the contemporary texts examined, what differs about the holographic self—and indeed, what separates it from the virtual self of the comparative texts—is that in each is a desire to supersede an individual body or concept of self as it is policed by structures of normative identity, identity as a fixed concept legible to systems of recognition, or identity as subject to a “karmic” notion of ethics. As such, if the holographic self makes visible the network of relations that constitute a (self)mediated subject, then there seems to be an almost hopeful notion of overlap between the digital virtual as material-ideological ground for the multiple dispersal of self across various sites of instantiation

and both Massumi's and Galloway's attempts to articulate the subject and mediation as a set of non-linear, non-hierarchical, and temporally multiple conglomerations.

At the same time, Massumi and Galloway's emphasis on the idea that the subsumption of that dispersed, affective network—or its subsumption into “the stylization of power”—is a core dimension of contemporary subjectivity and, as such, the materialization of identity online is bound up in this troubling, ambivalent relationship: on the one hand, of manifesting the networked self in a manner that lends a discursive, material, and affective space for dimensions of identity that temporarily and provisionally “escape” identity politics; but at the same time, in that destabilization of taxonomic or subject-ive “certainty,” it potentially loops the subject back into ever-more insidious networks of capitalist or hegemonic control.

Therefore, the reason *Open City* appears in this project about an ostensibly “post-digital subject”—with only the most minor occurrences of “digitality” appearing in the text—is the way in which it can be read as an expression of subjective multiplicity, and also a narrative of such. Phrased slightly differently, *Open City* is a narrative of the holographic cyborg as a networked self in a constant state of co-emergence with not just “external” factors, but also with a network of self-representations. Indeed, if one can say anything at all about a post-digital holographic subject it is this: the infuriated self-relation of the always part-subject may find a material and ideological ground in the digital virtual; and if this is the case, it demands a new kind of vocabulary and writing that not only always expresses a desire to exceed the notion of subject position, but also

provides intriguing possibilities to think through what might come after subject position-as-identity politics—but which neither negates the “politics” of the term, nor provides a definitively clear model. It is far too premature for that. Subject position, or the location of identity as syntagm among a grid of possibilities, is just the thing Haraway seeks to “overcome” with her ironic myth. But maybe most interestingly is that the ideal of a holographic self, when considered not only in terms of hermeneutics and reading, but also in terms of affect and infurcation—of how the subject is felt and feels, and how it folds back in on itself only to explode into a rhizomatic dispersion—may also form a fruitful base from which to think through the possibilities of “post-positionality subjectivity.”

To be entirely clear, an entire book’s worth of caveats is necessary here, not the least of which is this very simple idea: I am not in any way, shape, or form suggesting that the digital virtual as a field somehow allows for an escape from race as construct or identity as structure. As scholars like Lisa Nakamura have argued, race, power, and identity are not only a factor in online interactions, they are often exacerbated by the structure of digital sociality.⁵³ Instead, what I would like to highlight is that the discourse of the “post-racial” that arose after the election of Barack Obama in 2008 was accompanied by an interesting corollary in a desire to critique the model of subject position that has dominated identity theory for some time. Both Massumi and Galloway gingerly criticize the “post-linguistic turn” model of identity: Galloway for the subsumption of identity into post-Fordist capitalist processes of affective self-consumption, and Massumi for the what the “grid model” obscures in between the

location points of the body- or subjectivity-as-text. Yet, it is interesting that of the literary texts studied here, *A Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Londonstani*, and *Transmission* also express a desire to “overcome” the body-as-text through the location of self in a field beyond the body. Just as provocatively, *Pattern Recognition* and *Open City* seem to operate on an ideal that the existence of such a field manifests the destabilization of the subject as a unitary idea, and that *Open City* in particular suggests that such dispersion has serious consequences for not only recognition, but also for what that recognition does to link a subject to institutions, ethics, justice, or similarly complex sets of social relations. On the one hand is the desire for escape; on the other, the threat of such—and that the holographic self as flickering subject presents a profound challenge for a model of identity and a related politics that, has for very good reason, rested upon the body—the same body which is subject to the violence of the state, other subjects, pernicious ideologies, or the internalization of all three.

Could it be then that there is a kind of post-digital subjectivity that, in its material grounding in dispersed multiple spatio-temporal sites of subjectivity operating in networked relation to one another reconfigures the notion of identity that rests upon signification? And that, further, the troubling of signification outlined by Hayles and that runs through *Pattern Recognition* and *Open City* is one enabled by a field for extra-bodily self-representations, in all the complexity and difficulty such a notion might produce? It would be both premature and simply baseless to say so with any conclusiveness. What I could suggest, however, in order to return to the original goal of the project, is how to think through what such a hypothetical conclusion might mean for narratives of the

holographic self—both those examined in this dissertation, and akin to Yaszek’s discussion of cyborg writing, more generally as a narrative mode concerned with a prominent strand of contemporary history.

One might argue, then, that in certain instances, holographic subjectivity is a function of an economy of desire mapped onto an arrangement of “versions of self.” On the one hand, there is the issue of the subject as agent: as an autonomous entity that acts and reacts to context and power to shift relations to identity through moving them off the body onto fields of both signification and affective exchange. On the other hand is the inverse mapping: of economy onto desire, reproducing the established “shaping” of the subject but in new arenas of action, focusing on constituting a subject not only as consumer, but also as, if you might excuse the phrase, a subject of Facebook. To wit, it is the parameters and conditions by which subjectivity is conceived that become the site of contestation in the era of the digital. For my purposes, however, what is key—and perhaps the basic argument of this entire project—is that the web materializes and makes (holographically) visible the relations that mutually constitute a part-subject, part-object, and phenomenal-epistemological ground in co-existent simultaneous relation and emergence.

To return to and modify Yaszek, however, in each of the novels I have examined is a desire to exceed positionality. In *Londonstani* it is race and the body that Jas/on wants to escape; in *Transmission*, it is the body as locus of that is the prison that must be broken out of; and in *Open City*, it is the location of subjectivity at a single temporal

expression that is resisted. This is to say that in each text, the holographic self is a yearning—a desire for a field of self-presentation in which either race, the body, or the singular identity are effaced or erased in favour of a structure of relation between the bodily and the non-bodily representation. Further, that yearning is expressed as a logic of digitality: as a transmedia holographic self that is dispersed across space-time, but integrated into selfhood by that distance.

Is it a coincidence, then, that these focal texts are narratives of immigration or migration, or at the very least, cosmopolitanism? “Immigrant holographic writing” (if a term must be coined for referential ease) might be said to express a desire for the digital virtual as field of self-representation to provide a ground for post-positionality/post-“grid” selfing, such that the digital virtual forms an additional node that gestures toward not simply an extra-bodily basis for post-positionality notions of race—but also the interstitial spaces referred to by Massumi in his “rejection” of the linguistic turn: namely, that the grid model of identity formed by post-structuralism/deconstruction needs to find a ground for the affective dimensions that escape articulation, and perhaps the interstitial-ness of the digital virtual is that ground. After all, key to those ideas are the notions of movement, flux, hybridity, and a virtual third space, and those ideas are themselves key to contemporary ideas about cosmopolitanism. The difference, however, is in the latter term: that the receding or “immaterial” notion of Bhabha’s third space is now not so out-of-reach or “immaterial.” If, as Bhabha argues, the production of ambivalent newness between a You and an I “requires that these two places be mobilized through a passage through a Third Space” (*Location* 36), then that so-called Third Space

has a discursive analog in the digital virtual—by which I mean both that it is not actually immaterial, yet it functions as a socio-economic field of exchange. It seems, then, that if Haraway and Yaszek argue that cyborg writing is a way of narratively mapping out the desire for a post-positionality self, then holographic writing may do so in conceiving of the (immigrant) subject as a structure of relation between a body and a constellation of fields of recognition and expression. Cosmopolitan holographic writing may be a genre or form that mines the overlap and analogous structural and epistemological links between the movement between physical and digital, and home and host country, native culture and adopted one, the "singular" cultural identity and the multiple one of movement-vision.

As such, what warrants further investigation is perhaps whether or not holographic writing may be a useful genre for twenty-first century immigrant narratives. Maybe most fruitfully, Hari Kunzru's other work seems to evince a pattern of the holographic—and this from an author who, in multiple ways, is in motion between fields. *The Impressionist* is an exploration of Pran Nath's movement through a variety of differing identity expressions, and at the end of the text, the protagonist also slips away into an undefined future. Similarly, Kunzru's *My Revolution* tells of Chris Carver, a former activist who has been living under a different identity, until the possibility of sustaining the lie falls apart. Again, Carver disappears into an unfixed resolution. This structure suggests that the location of identity in spatio-temporal terms may be a useful analytic lens for thinking through how the digital virtual as epistemological ground engages identity beyond, as I have expressed, only a desire to exceed positionality or the

singularity of subject position. The holographic self demands a parallax vision in which the hologram is a legible or invisible screen through which to view the self and vice versa. A study of Kunzru's work as exemplary of cosmopolitan holographic selves may prove fruitful. In a related vein, Teju Cole has experimented with fiction on the information service Twitter, in which he both writes "microfiction" and collects narratives by stitching together or crowdsourcing fragments of narrative from people scattered and dispersed across the globe. There would be an interesting overlap in the holographic nature of the narrative and, if you will excuse the phrase, the holographic nature of holographic writing.

As such, what would require further inquiry is a study that would deploy Massumi's emphasis on flux and Galloway's emphasis on infurcation to examine the role of affect, intensity, and movement in the constellational arrangement of self. Consider, for example, that Jas/on in *Londonstani* achieves his end despite the return of a framework in which racial normativity is partially enforced. To wit, the resultant, potentially ironic production of hybridity is produced by an affective or intensive relationship between Jason and his hologram. It may be discarded at the end of the novel, but it has not only done its practical work; it has done its affective work too—and affect lingers.

What one might ask is that if positionality operates in relation to power through the exercise of self-policing and the interpellative structure of representation, then is there a *feeling* to the internet that might do something to that largely semiotic relation?

That, in the flux of movement of the holographic self, in the infuriated mediation between an array of kaleidoscopic selves, intensity and affect may begin to warp the axes of The Grid?

Endnotes

¹ There is obviously no point attempting to fit Lacan's idea of the *imago* into an endnote, but it belongs here because of the constitutive nature of the image of the Other, even when that image is "of the self," albeit one recognized as re-cognized in afterwardness (hearkening to Freud's *Nachträglichkeit*). *Imago*, after all, is a likeness, not a replication. From "The Mirror Stage": "It suffices to understand the mirror stage in this context as an identification, in the full sense analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes [assume] an image—an image that is seemingly predestined to have an effect at this phase, as witnessed by the use in analytic theory of antiquity's term, "imago." (77). Similarly: "The function of the mirror stage thus turns out, in my view, to be a particular case of the function of imagos, which is to establish a relationship between an organism and its reality—or, as they say, between the Innenwelt and the Umwelt." (78). The reason the imago is a useful idea for digital studies is the scattering of various 'mis-recognized' representations of self across the digital virtual. Thus, when Lacan states the following — "Indeed, for imagos—whose veiled faces we analysts see emerge in our daily experience and in the penumbra of symbolic effectiveness—the specular image seems to be the threshold of the visible world, if we take into account the mirrored disposition of the imago of one's own body in hallucinations and dreams, whether it involves one's individual features, or even one's infirmities or object projections; or if we take note of the role of the mirror apparatus in the appearance of doubles, in which psychical realities manifest themselves that are, moreover, heterogeneous." (77) — particularly in its reference to dreams, he suggests that the doubled self-image (and indeed heterogeneous, multiplied one) is not only constitutive of the self, but part of putting the self comprehensibly into a symbolically given world.

² Actualization in the psychological sense of the term stems from Abraham Maslow's work on a hierarchy of needs. In Joseph Sassoon's *Self-Actualization: Theory and Technology*, he states that Maslow believed "self-fulfilment does indeed comprise the natural development of the organism" (xi) and that a series of 'positive' qualities "were all the gifts of by-products of innate potentialities that have been realized" (xii). That emphasis on "realization" is clearly teleological and hierarchical, and is not how I am using the term. Rather, my emphasis upon that conjoined relation between an expectation and its actualization is about the ideological frame of the text and whether, within that frame, the protagonist "achieves" or "succeeds." It is precisely that shift from a referential mode to the mimetic function of literature, however, that justifies the use of the *Bildungsroman* as a model to illustrate certain ideas.

³ *Fabula* and *sujet* (or, often, *szujet*) are terms from the work of Russian Formalists Vladimir Propp and Viktor Shklovsky to connote a difference between the elements of a narrative sequence and the arrangement of those elements. See Shklovsky's *Energy of Delusion: A Book on Plot* for more, and also Mieke Bal's *Narratology* for an expansion of the idea. Although strictly structuralist terms may be less useful now, I invoke the pairing here to emphasize that the linear, but not necessarily chronological, arrangement of narrative elements enables particular effects on the reader. For example, both *Londonstani* and *Open City* rely on revealing chronologically pre-existing "truths" near the linear end of the books in order to reframe the narrative that came before.

⁴ The term Information Communication Technologies or ICTs refers to the interlinked infrastructure of digital technology used to enable electronic communication. The emphasis on communication—rather than the term "Information Technology" or IT—tends to be on the interconnected infrastructural networks that sustain and enable such communication.

⁵ Internet is not capitalized in this work because I do not consider it a proper noun. Generally, there has been a historical distinction between "an internet" which means a collection of networks and "the Internet" which referred to a generalized sense of "the place where things happened online." I am specifically refusing

that usage as it posits “the Internet” as a field unto itself in the terms of a spatial rhetoric that distinguishes it from other sites of human action. The internet is too imbricated in materiality and too multiple for such usage. Capitalization has, as one would expect however, been left intact in quotations.

⁶ The field of generativity I am referring to here is simply the Deleuzian virtual, which Deleuze expounds upon most clearly in *Difference and Repetition*, but of course runs through all his work—such as in *A Thousand Plateaus*, where it takes the name “the Earth.” The point here, however, is that at least in my own work, I am not trying to give the digital an inherent character, but rather to suggest that the notion of a field of generativity is fraught in relation to digitality. Enmeshed as it is in daily life of so many individuals, it is neither alternate space, nor simply a site of expression that *must* replicate the ideological conditions that bore it. The point is to suspend the competing definitions of “the virtual” in simultaneous, parallax relation.

⁷ Though I flesh out the Deleuzian ideal of actualization later in the introduction, here I will note that in *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze says the following: “It is as though everything has two odd, dissymmetrical and dissimilar ‘halves’, the two halves of the Symbol, each dividing itself in two: an ideal half submerged in the virtual and constituted on the one hand by differential relations and on the other by corresponding singularities; an actual half constituted on the one hand by the qualities actualising those relations and on the other by the parts actualising those singularities” (279). This is to say that, quite different from the teleological nature of its function in Maslow’s discourse, “actualization” for Deleuze is non-linear in its manifestation of the (Deleuzian) virtual. The point is thus that Deleuzian actualization is not predictable, predictive or expressive of an idealized one-to-one relationship, but is instead analogous to Bhabha’s notion of hybridity: that each enunciation/actualization itself foregrounds the ambivalent conditions of production. For Bhabha, that ambivalence is semiotic, for Deleuze, ontological. See Bhabha’s *Location of Culture*.

⁸ For more, see Mark Redfield’s *Phantom Formations*, which emphasizes the relationship between the aesthetic construction of the *Bildungsroman* and the ideological investments of various examples of the (not quite) genre.

⁹ A short note of terminology: the hologram is the holographic object, or the object “made of light”; holography is the process of making holograms; the holographic refers to both the fields and disciplines of holography and holograms; and holograph is entirely separate, and refers to a kind of document. The etymology is Greek for both halves of the term, holo meaning “whole” and gram meaning “writing or recording.”

¹⁰ Object Oriented Ontology as a school of thought began with Graham Harman’s *Tool Being*, which is a rethinking of Heidegger’s distinction between present-at-hand and ready-to-hand. The overall school, however, is essentially an attempt to resist both the linguistic turn and its relation to “correlationism,” i.e. the necessity of an object existing *for* a subject. Though not quite the same as Bruno Latour’s flat ontology, OOO nonetheless seeks to understand a world composed of relations between “things” without prioritizing the subject(ive). One obvious direction for the approach has been in ecology, such as in the work of Tim Morton.

¹¹ In the original French: “*Le premier était de ne recevoir jamais aucune chose pour vraie, que je ne la connusse évidemment être telle: c’est-à-dire, d’éviter soigneusement la précipitation et la prévention; et de ne comprendre rien de plus en mes jugements, que ce qui se présenterait si clairement et si distinctement à mon esprit, que je n’eusse aucune occasion de le mettre en doute*” (47, my emphasis).

¹² In the original French: “*Puis, examinant avec attention ce que j’étais, et voyant que je pouvais feindre que je n’avais aucun corps.*”

¹³ In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Spivak provides an updated version of “Can the Subaltern Speak?” She again notes, in a reference to a conversation between Deleuze and Foucault, the running together of two senses of representation from Marx’s *The Eighteenth Brumaire*. “*Vertreten*” is “representation as ‘speaking for’, as in politics” (256); and “*darstellen*” is “representation as re-presentation, as in art of philosophy” (256). Spivak’s concern with the conflation of these two meanings as one is that “running them together, especially to say that beyond both is where oppressed subjects, speak, act, and know *for themselves*, leads to an essentialist utopian politics” (259, original emphasis). Such a politics posits the subaltern as both accessible and not, able to speak for him or herself and yet simultaneously cut off from the material-ideological circulation of discourse. The point for digital studies, however, is that the act of self-representation both occurs from an position of enunciative privilege, yet still gets placed into relations of semiotic and ideological exchange, such that the avatar both stands for the self in “another” system, but not only speaks for, but also is spoken for and through as a function of the kind of semantic determinacy highlighted by Barthes in “The Death of the Author.”

¹⁴ Kim makes a grammatical error here; Husserl obviously never sat in a lecture hall as one might in a Web site.

¹⁵ Discussed in “The Cyborg Manifesto” and other of Haraway’s writings, the term connotes an *informational* regime of domination that deploys data, science, and particular understandings of subjects (and animals) within a structure that values the supposed “objectivity” of that data above all else. Such concerns have been taken up by contemporary scholars in critiquing the era of “Big Data” that seeks to almost exactly what Haraway warned against.

¹⁶ The affective turn evokes the linguistic turn before it, and is a shift in the academy that attempts to take seriously “affect”—which can mean emotion, but also intensities, pre-cognitive relations, flows of energy—and examine what the dimensions of experience that escaped signification nonetheless contributed to both the individual and social relations. *The Affective Turn* is a collection of essays that examines such ideas. Brian Massumi, who factors prominently into other parts of this dissertation, is also a key figure in the movement, and indeed, his concern with “Sensation, Movement, Affect” is indicative of the tenor of the thinking.

¹⁷ Avatars as a concept stem from Hinduism and the belief that supernatural beings manifest in both differing bodily forms and spiritual representations also. In “Anandamayi Ma: God Came As a Woman” in *The Life of Hinduism*, Lisa Lassell Hallstrom notes that *avatara* is a doctrine of divine incarnation in which a divine being descends and “in which spirit is considered to have become material by the will of God” (174).

¹⁸ Though interpellation in the strict Althusserian sense is obviously meant to imply the inability to determine one’s subjectivity, when I say “two-way interpellation,” I refer to the deliberate representation of an aesthetic form of self in order to self-present in particular ways. What I do not mean to imply is a neat, simplistic version of agency; what I do mean to imply is the operation of that self-representation within a network of ideological relations such that, for example, highlighting conventional attractiveness or material possessions within self-representation is a specific status-seeking move related to cultural capital.

¹⁹ *Desi* is a Punjabi term meaning both “of home” and “an individual who is of home,” an adjective and noun respectively—and, as such, is capitalized accordingly in this dissertation (lower case for use as an adjective, capitalized when used as a proper noun). As Sunaina Maira notes in “B-Boys and Bass Girls” in *Desi Rap: Hip Hop and South Asian America*, it has also come to signify “a pan-South Asian rubric increasingly emphasized in the second generation that literally means of *South Asia* (desh)” (42, original italicization). It has taken up a particular kind of currency amongst diasporic Indian populations who use it both to mark

out a cultural trajectory connected to India, but also a hybridized identity that is arguably the basis for much of Hardjit and Arun's characters in *Londonstani*.

²⁰ Referred to by Walter Ong as I referenced in the introduction, in which Ong discusses a conception of self defined by the external social relations of oral societies. "What can I say about my own heart? How can I talk about my character? Ask others; they can tell you about me. I myself can't say anything" (Ong 64).

²¹ Textspeak is a form of electronically mediated communication that stemmed from certain technological limits of early mobile phones. The scenario of typing rendered more difficult than on a QWERTY keyboard and text messages limited to 160 characters engendered an alphanumeric short form – such as 2 for too, or l8r for later – popular for the duration of the that technology's dominance. See Cambridge's *Language and the Internet* by David Crystal, or "Intrtxtlty" by Johnathan Green in *Critical Quarterly* Vol 49 (3).

²² The ever-present issue with hybridity—such as the assertion of hyphenated identities, is the solidification of the constituent identities as singular, whole. For perhaps the best critique of this construction, see Shalini Puri's *The Caribbean Postcolonial: Social Equality, Post-Nationalism, and Cultural Hybridity*.

²³ In an interview in the postscript of the 2006 Harper Perennial paperback, Malkani states that the decision to use slang was "really just an extension of my decision to write my research as a novel rather than as some ethnographic study" (3).

²⁴ Multicultural London English is the term given to a dialect that has emerged in Southern Britain in the last 20 years. It is marked by diphthong shift reversal and a movement to pronunciation of vowels further back in the mouth. It is also a polyglot amalgam of Caribbean and South Asian slang, while also borrowing heavily from Black British English. The dialect is, unsurprisingly, bound up in relations of both class and race, and continues to evolve. For more see Paul Kerswill and Eivind Torgersen. "Endogenous change in inner-London teenage speech?: 'Diphthong Shift' reversal and other vowel changes."

²⁵ see Note 22.

²⁶ World Wide Web is capitalized because it is still makes sense as a proper noun, as it refers to a specific selection of networks that operate as a series of interlinked hypertext documents on the Hypertext Transfer Protocol. While the internet is a nebulous term for all activity online, the World Wide Web can, even though it is composed of hundreds of billions of pages, still be thought of in terms of a singular entity due to the unification of web pages under an interlinked, and mutually co-constitutive technical standard.

²⁷ See pages 26-27 in introduction for a discussion of how Barthes's emphasis upon "signification in the absence of the author" in "Death of the Author" relies on the book itself as material object.

²⁸ Herman Wallace was released on October 1st, 2013, after being diagnosed with terminal liver cancer. He died three days later.

²⁹ These connections were made both in the introduction and in chapter 1. Generally speaking, however, if the emphasis of this project is subjectivity, then the poststructuralist subject's focus upon multiplicity, a temporal fluidity, performativity, and irreducibility are all expressed in the digital avatar. For the clearest articulation of this idea, see Mark Poster's *The Information Subject*.

³⁰ In describing this absence from the diegetic frame of the text, I mean the immediate world of Arjun, and in saying that, I mean to assert a kind of hierarchy between the geographic and temporal spaces that are focalized by the text, and those that become secondary. More specifically, though, the voice of the text's coda "Noise" operates in a different mode, and eschews the omniscient third-person fictional narrator,

ostensibly put forward as being both of and “above” the world in which Arjun exists, thinks, and self-reflects. Instead, “Noise” no longer claims the omniscience of the narrator deployed in the previous parts of the novel, instead using its lack of knowledge as exactly the reason for the existence on the coda within the narrative.

³¹ The vocabulary of aspirational planes and horizons of expectation is usually associated with Hans Robert Jauss and reception theory, which, according to Robert C. Holub in *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction*, held that “literature should be treated as a dialectical process of production and reception” (57) in terms of a doubled historical trajectory that not only looks for (ostensibly Marxist) connections between materiality and aesthetic production, but of the connections between materiality and the cultural production of subjective and aesthetic “tastes” and ideological views. Holub suggests that Jauss’s name for this phenomenon—a horizon of expectations—referred to “an intersubjective system or structure of expectations, a ‘system of references’ or a mind-set that a hypothetical individual might bring to any text” (59). The point, however, is that the concept of a horizon, both in criticism and as a concept to think about character development, implies a set on “conditions of possibility” that frame what is and is not available to the reader and the character.

³² In *Rabelais and His World*, literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin argues that the carnivalesque is a literary phenomenon that reflects the social tradition of *carnivale* in which traditional social norms are upended. Bakhtin did admit, however, that because the structures that are temporarily subverted—especially the church—remain in power, the social tradition is potentially conservative in that it reifies power. Whether or not this applies to the literary carnivalesque, however, is more contentious. Here, I am arguing that Leela’s liminality as both threat and subversive presence cannot be reduced to either a progressive or conservative reading of technology.

³³ See Nusselder’s discussion of Doel and Clarke on p. 46 of the introduction.

³⁴ For perhaps the best articulation of these ideas, see McKenzie Wark’s work on Public Seminar at <http://www.publicseminar.org/2013/11/accelerationism/#.UpeaGGRDu6p>

³⁵ W.E.B. DuBois uses the term “double-consciousness” in *The Souls of Black Folk*. “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (45). What is perhaps interestingly relevant here is the virtual position of the gaze that reconciles the two.

³⁶ Ambient Intimacy is a term of indeterminate origin coined some time in either 2008 or 2009. It refers to the contextual collapse of online social services that generate a spatially multiplied ambient awareness of the details and minutiae of others’ lives. It was perhaps best explored in a *New York Times* article by Clive Thompson in 2009. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/07/magazine/07awareness-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

³⁷ For an examination of the Heideggerian concept of Enframing, please see pages 8-12 in the introduction. Briefly, though, the idea posits technology as a mechanism of rendering reality that is not “pre-existent” but is shaped by the act of shaping itself such that technology or *techne* are ways of constituting reality.

³⁸ Cyberspace appears as a concept in Gibson’s famed *Neuromancer*, where it is more akin to virtual reality, in which the senses are literally and figuratively immersed in a digitized, fictional “world.” Arguably – and was argued by Thomas Jones in *The Guardian* – the term is outdated, as it connotes a separate (digital-dualistic) space in which the visual dominates over the textual, something at odds with not only the character of much digital media, but also the bleed back and forth, and thus mutual co-constitution,

between the two fields. See: <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/sep/22/william-gibson-beyond-cyberspace>

³⁹ The phrase “the map precedes the territory” is usually associated with both Jean Baudrillard and Guy Debord. For Baudrillard, it was a phrase meant to invert the notion that the discursive, mimetic or taxonomic simply “represented” reality. Instead, as Baudrillard argues in *Simulacra and Simulations*, “Abstraction today is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory - precession of simulacra - it is the map that engenders the territory and if we were to revive the fable today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges subsist here and there, in the deserts which are no longer those of the Empire, but our own. The desert of the real itself.”

⁴⁰ U.S. Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld used the phrase “known unknowns” and “unknown unknowns” on February 12, 2002, at a press briefing in which he was attempting to justify the American invasion of Iraq after threats of chemical weapons were not found.

⁴¹ Remixing is the practice of stitching together, rearranging, or recontextualizing wholes or parts of existing works in order to form new ones. See Lawrence Lessig’s much-cited book *Remix* for more. Also relevant is Marcus Boon’s work *In Praise of Copying*.

⁴² Eliot’s “Tradition and the Individual Talent” argues that additions to a central body of texts positioned as “the canon” don’t simply add to a list of works, but reframe the aesthetic evaluations of that which came before. Though less popular now for its insistence on a normative canon, the central metaphor of a reconfiguration backward through time remains useful. From Eliot’s *The Sacred Wood* (42-54).

⁴³ Spivak’s essay, which was modified with a mea culpa of sorts for its publication in the seminal *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, asserts an intertwined relationship between a discursive economy and the figure of the subaltern as a kind of constitutive currency, i.e. a necessary construct that enabled a particular sort of leftist, neo-colonial politics. The obvious downside is that to constitute subjects as figures or discursive images is to always doubly-displace both their agency and oppression. Spivak invokes Lyotard’s notion of *le différénd* in order to suggest that the cultural currency of the subaltern as figure would also render the expression of such sublated in the terms of an normative, hegemonic discourse. The term, which in classic French poststructuralist style is a homonym, was explicated by Lyotard in a book of the same name.

⁴⁴ The section title here is a reference to Alain Badiou’s “On a Finally Objectless Subject.” A dense, complex essay, in it Badiou asserts the need to think through the notion of the subject when it, as a locus of truth, inevitably constitutes the object in a certain way: “can we think an objectless subject? In the twofold sense in which, concerning such a subject, one can neither designate his correlate in presentation, nor suppose that he answers to any of thought’s objectives” (24). Put another way, Badiou’s concern here is epistemology and a system of thought that is attempting to assert political claims from empirical statements about objects as it also acknowledges the effect of the co-productive relationship of a provisional, contingent subject on the object itself. I invoke the title here in order to suggest that, though Badiou himself would object, there is a virtualized dimension to the very epistemological process he articulates.

⁴⁵ Interpellation is a term from Louis Althusser's classic essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in which, drawing in equal measure from both Lacan and Lenin, he argued that the Subject is "hailed" or "interpellated" by ideology to form him or herself in the terms of ideology (160-170).

⁴⁶ See Note 10.

⁴⁷ The quote comes from Alexis Madrigal's brief review of the text on the website of periodical *The Atlantic*. <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2011/12/the-best-book-i-read-this-year/249651/#slide20>

⁴⁸ This is a reference to a line from Theodor Adorno's essay "Prisms": "The more total society becomes, the greater the reification of the mind and the more paradoxical its effort to escape reification on its own. Even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter. Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today. Absolute reification, which presupposed intellectual progress as one of its elements, is now preparing to absorb the mind entirely. Critical intelligence cannot be equal to this challenge as long as it confines itself to self-satisfied contemplation" (*Prisms* 34). Though the usual understanding of the line seems to be that to create the aesthetically beautiful after Auschwitz is barbaric, one could also argue that creating poetry after Auschwitz is to inevitably be subsumed into the broader historical dialectic of capitalism and "barbarism" that produced Auschwitz itself.

⁴⁹ From Galloway's *The Interface Effect*: "in Deleuze, remember, it is the nonsubjective that is the machinic" (76).

⁵⁰ In Laclau and Mouffe's *The Radical Democratic Imaginary*, a solution offered to the question of identity-based politics is offered in the form of a "radical democracy" that prioritizes a political relation to the state predicated on one's affinity as citizen, rather than an affinity based on cultural or other identity formations.

⁵¹ "The Master's Tools will Never Dismantle the Master's House" is the much-quoted name of an essay by Audre Lorde which engages the issue of whether or not an ideologically symmetrical relation between the politics of oppression and resistance is workable as resistance, or if replicates the power imbalances it seeks to address.

⁵² In "Signs Taken for Wonders" from *Location of Culture*, Bhabha uses the chapatis to focus in on what he considers the inherent ambivalence of signification. "This is the question that brings us to the ambivalence of the presence of authority, peculiarly visible in its colonial articulation. For if transparency signifies discursive closure – intention, image, author – it does so through a disclosure of its *rules of recognition* – those social texts of epistemic, ethnocentric, nationalist intelligibility which cohere in the address of authority as the 'present', the voice of modernity. The acknowledgement of authority depends upon the immediate – unmediated – visibility of its rules of recognition as the unmistakable referent of historical necessity. In the doubly inscribed space of colonial representation where the presence of authority – the English book – is also a question of its repetition and displacement, where transparency is techné; the immediate visibility of such a regime of recognition is resisted. Resistance is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention, nor is it the simple negation or exclusion of the 'content' of another culture, as a difference once perceived. It is the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate the signs of cultural difference and reimplicate them within the deferential relations of colonial power – hierarchy, normalization, marginalization and so forth" (Bhabha 110).

⁵³ See 2007's *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet*, and 2011's *Race After the Internet*.

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